



PHD

Helga Konigsdorf's evolving identities: an Eastern German author's responses to an era of personal and political upheaval (1978-1998)

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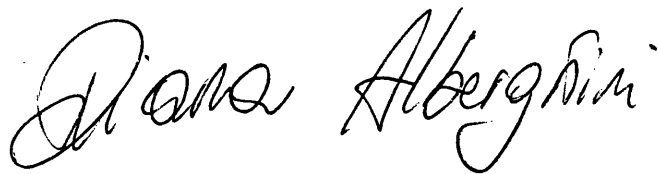
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**Helga Königsdorf's Evolving Identities:
an Eastern German Author's Responses
to an Era of Personal and Political Upheaval
(1978-1998)**

Submitted by Diana Alberghini
for the degree of PhD
of the University of Bath
2000

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Diana Alberghini". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Diana" and last name "Alberghini" clearly distinguishable.

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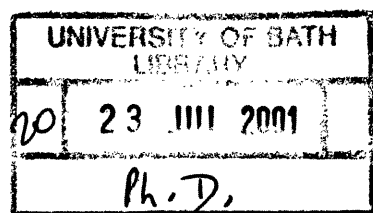
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Abstract

Adopting a new approach to providing a comprehensive picture of an Eastern German author's development through the years before, during and after the 'peaceful Revolution', this thesis views the life and work of Helga Königsdorf as a complex of complementary identities: as a woman, a scientist, an intellectual, a citizen and a creative writer. The evolution of each of these identities is examined separately in the five parallel chapters of the thesis. In each chapter the relative significance of Königsdorf's GDR experience, her provisional responses to the events of 1989-90, and her more considered post-unification stances are investigated. Identity is viewed in the modernist sense not as a fixed set of inherent personal characteristics but as an understanding of the self subject to change through the combined effects of personal reassessment and interaction with the rest of society. Accordingly, it is possible to outline a differentiated picture of the development of each identity over this complex era of transition.

Chapter One analyses Königsdorf's growing self-awareness as a woman in relation to issues of gender, the exploration of which was facilitated by the transformation of the public sphere in 1989-90 and the subsequent lifting of the taboo on subjects such as lesbianism. The interest in contributing to the well-being of mankind through a critical analysis of society's structures and mechanisms displayed by Königsdorf in these writings is very similar to the one which characterises her identity as a scientist, as presented in Chapter Two. Even if following the openness brought about by the 'peaceful Revolution' she increasingly preferred non-fictional genres to deal with scientific issues, her critical evaluation of scientific progress has remained constant throughout her literary career. More radical is the development of Königsdorf's intellectual profile analysed in Chapter Three, as it involves the

revision of her political ideals and the adjustment to a transformed cultural scene. Loss is the central concept of Chapter Four dealing with Königsdorf's identity as a citizen, as she found herself having to re-define the meaning of homeland (*Heimat*) and re-create a sense of belonging for herself. The identity crisis which overtook her after the collapse of the GDR is reflected in her first post-unification novels. Although after 1990 she wrote fewer short stories than before, she continued to ascribe to literature the same communicative functions as it had during the GDR years, even if her tone became more resigned. The process leading to the re-definition of her literary identity is discussed in Chapter 5.

Overall, the thesis shows that, for a number of reasons, the evolution of Königsdorf's identities follows a complex pattern: Königsdorf had to completely reconstruct her identity as a citizen, she underwent a difficult re-negotiation process to adapt her identities as an intellectual and a creative writer to the cultural landscape of unified Germany, while the events of 1989-90 gave her the opportunity to expand her identities as a woman writer and as a scientist.

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Abbreviations

AD	<i>Adieu DDR: Protokolle eines Abschieds</i>
DC	<i>Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen</i>
EG	<i>Die Entsorgung der Großmutter</i>
GA	<i>Gleich neben Afrika</i>
LV	<i>Lichtverhältnisse</i>
LD	<i>Der Lauf der Dinge</i>
MS	<i>1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit</i>
MT	<i>Meine ungehörigen Träume</i>
SR	<i>Im Schatten des Regenbogens</i>
RU	<i>Respektloser Umgang</i>
RW	<i>Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt</i>
UB	<i>Ungelegener Befund</i>
UD	<i>Unterwegs nach Deutschland</i>

Introduction

0.1 The Historical and Literary Background of Helga Königsdorf's Works

As her first literary work, *Meine ungehörigen Träume*, appeared in 1978 and her latest, *Der gewöhnliche Wahnsinn*, in 1998, Helga Königsdorf's career as a published writer covers a period of exactly 20 years marked about half way through by the most significant political event of the post-war years: the unification of the two Germanies. Born in 1938, Königsdorf was a student of physics in Jena and in Berlin in the 1950s and 1960s. She started writing at the age of forty during the Honecker era, after entering the Academy of Sciences (*Akademie der Wissenschaften*) in 1961, where she worked as a mathematician until 1990. Her literary production consists of numerous fictional works, above all novels and short stories, and non-fictional writings, such as collections of essays and articles and even interviews.

During the Honecker era, writers in the GDR enjoyed phases of relative artistic freedom which alternated, however, with periods of severe repression. When Erich Honecker acceded to power in 1971, the first impression he gave was of being willing to loosen the cultural restrictions which had considerably limited the artists' independence in the Ulbricht years. His famous 'no taboos' speech,¹ which was supposed to inaugurate a new phase of openness in the cultural life of the country, revived the reformist hopes of the intellectuals, in some cases even of those whose faith in the attainability of a socialist utopia had been shattered as a result of the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968. However, while a

¹ In his speech Honecker declared: 'Wenn man von der festen Position des Sozialismus ausgeht, kann es meines Erachtens auf dem Gebiet von Kunst und Literatur keine Tabus geben. Das betrifft sowohl die Fragen der inhaltlichen Gestaltung als auch des Stils – kurz gesagt: die Fragen dessen, was man die künstlerische Meisterschaft nennt'. Cited from Erich Honecker's concluding speech at the 4th conference of the Central Committee of the SED (16./17.12.1971), bearing the title 'Hauptaufgabe umfaßt auch weitere Erhöhung des kulturellen Niveaus', in Rüß, G. (ed.), *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED 1971-1974* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1976), 287-288 (here 287).

qualitative difference in GDR cultural life could without doubt be observed after 1971, this was short-lived. Soon afterwards the Party re-adopted its restrictive line and repressive measures towards critically-minded intellectuals which culminated with the expatriation of the singer Wolf Biermann in 1976.²

Although it is debatable whether Biermann's expulsion was a decisive turning point in the cultural life of the 1970s,³ what is certain is that it was followed by another wave of hostilities between writers and Party leadership. Many intellectuals left, the ones who stayed had to fight back against censorship and self-censorship, while trying to find new ways of communicating with the Party officials. Their efforts seemed in vain when, in 1979, Stefan Heym and eight of his colleagues were expelled from the Berlin Branch of the Writers' Union. For many intellectuals this represented yet another body-blow to their reformist hopes and contributed to creating the atmosphere of despair about the future of socialism which, combined with concern for the survival of the planet threatened by ecological disaster and the destructive power of nuclear energy, made the 1980s into a gloomy decade.

² To give an idea of the instability of the Party's attitude towards the intellectuals, it is sufficient to point out that while the publication of works such as Irmtraud Morgner's *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* (1974), Gerti Tetzner's *Karen W.* (1974) and Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand* (1974) or the emergence of documentary literature with Sarah Kirsch's collection of interviews *Die Pantherfrau* attest to the new cultural openness of the early 1970s, in this period there were also episodes of repression and intolerance. An example in this regard is the treatment of Volker Braun's novel *Unvollendete Geschichte*, which appeared in *Sinn und Form* in 1975, but was not given permission to be published as a book until 1988.

³ In his article 'Keeping the Biermann Affair in Perspective', Dennis Tate discusses why the importance of Biermann's expatriation should not be exaggerated and argues that the period of power struggles between writers and Party leadership began in 1974 and culminated in the 1979 with the expulsion of Stefan Heym and eight other writers from the Berlin Branch of the Writers' Union. By contrast, in his article 'The Politics of Confrontation: The Biermann Affair and its Consequences', Ian Wallace sees Biermann's expatriation as a turning point in the relationship between intellectuals and Party officials. Tate's article was published in Atkins, R. and Kane, M. (eds), *Retrospect and Review: Aspects of the Literature of the GDR 1976-1990*, German Monitor 40 (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), 1-15, while Wallace's essay appeared in Goodbody, A. and Tate, D. (eds), *Geist und Macht: Writers and the State in the GDR*, German Monitor 29 (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992), 68-80.

The increasing alienation existing between critically-minded intellectuals and the political class is only one of the aspects of the GDR's general decline during the Honecker era. The relationship between the population and their leaders was also marked by a profound sense of alienation, which in the long run gave rise to what Günter Gaus called the *Nischengesellschaft*⁴ ('niche society'), an expression of the people's passive protest against the undemocratic character of their political system. Their discontent was furthermore fuelled by a stagnating economy disrespectful of the environment and by the obstinate refusal of the Party to acknowledge Gorbachev's reformist programme and his politics of *glasnost*. In every sphere of life, the GDR seemed to be immobilised by a complete lack of new drive and innovation.

As Königsdorf started writing in 1978, two years after the expatriation of Biermann, she felt less disillusioned than most of her colleagues about the possibility of playing a reformist role simply because she had fewer battles to fight and fewer disappointments to endure. While other writers went through a first loss of illusions in 1968, then again in 1976 and in 1979, on these occasions Königsdorf was not or only marginally involved in the literary sphere of the GDR. As a consequence, until the collapse of the GDR in 1989, she had continued to believe in the attainability of the socialist utopia, to which she had hoped to contribute with her critical writings. Her enthusiasm and optimism at times translate themselves into a general sense of hope for the future pervading her work; in other cases, it was her active participation in the cultural life of the country which attests to her continuous commitment to reforming the society of the GDR. An example of this is her involvement in the Tenth Writers' Congress in 1987 in which Königsdorf courageously invited her

⁴ Gaus, G., *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983), 156-233.

audience to come forward as individuals representing only themselves without constantly hiding behind an institution or an organisation.⁵

Another aspect of Königsdorf's experience within GDR cultural life which explains why she was not as disillusioned as some of her colleagues is the fact that, even if indirectly, she did benefit from the short period of relative literary freedom which followed Honecker's accession to power. 1974, for instance, was the year when a new cultural phenomenon, of which Königsdorf became part, started being widely recognised: the emergence of a specific GDR women's literature (*Frauenliteratur*). With the publication of three major works all in the course of this year, namely Irmtraud Morgner's *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz*, Gerti Tetzner's *Karen W.* and Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand*, written by female authors about women looking for individual self-realisation, the need of women to address issues of emancipation and share their experience with other women became undeniable.⁶ Königsdorf, whose first attempts at writing were broadly based on her familiarity with the scientific establishment of the GDR and her experience as a woman, joined this new wave of literature, tackling the question of women's emancipation in some of her short stories. It is then

⁵ For Königsdorf's contribution to the Tenth Writers' Congress, see Königsdorf, H., *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit: Eine Collage aus Briefen, Gedichten, Texten* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1990), 7-9. Hereafter: MS. Here it appears under the title 'Von der Schwierigkeit, "Ich" zu sagen'. This text was first published in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1988, 57-59.

⁶ See note 2 above. In addition, it is important to mention again Sarah Kirsch's *Die Pantherfrau* which had a huge impact on the literary scene of the GDR because of the directness with which the women she interviewed talked about their experiences within their family, career and sexuality. See Kirsch, S., *Die Pantherfrau* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1978), first published in 1973. In line with this work is Maxie Wander's collection of interviews *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, which appeared in 1977. Here too the frankness of the tape-recorded monologues contributed to making the book into a sensation while helping to bring onto the social agenda previously unspoken or socially tabooed issues, such as the patriarchal structure of family life, sexuality and the difficulty of combining work, motherhood and household duties. See Wander, M., *Guten Morgen, du Schöne – Frauen in der DDR: Protokolle* (Darmstadt; Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1979), first published in 1977. Another work which deserves mention is the collection of short stories on gender transformation *Blitz aus heitrem Himmel* edited by the American Edith Anderson. It was Anderson herself who in 1975 had the idea of asking GDR authors to write stories on this topic. Many writers welcomed the initiative and produced texts, including the well-known story by Christa Wolf entitled 'Selbstversuch', which first appeared in Anderson's book. See Anderson, E. (ed.), *Blitz aus heitrem Himmel* (Rostock: Hinstorff, 1975).

clear that Königsdorf did not have to come to terms with the sterility of a literature based on Socialist Realism (*sozialistischer Realismus*)⁷ as was the case with other writers of her generation who had started writing in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, when she entered the literary scene of the GDR, authors had already begun searching for more experimental ways to represent reality and challenging certain established truths, such as the claimed achievement of female emancipation.

One of the literary tendencies which represents a further example of the evolution of GDR literary discourse away from the rigidity of Socialist Realism and which Königsdorf embraced at the onset of her career, is the exploration of the realm of imagination and fantasy and of the world of dreams, myths and fairy tales. This use of the fantastic, which was largely promoted by the playful style of Irmtraud Morgner, helped to show alternatives to conventional patterns, to open up new dimensions with the aim of fostering the more complete development of the individual. This is also the approach which Königsdorf adopts in her three pre-1989 collections of short stories, *Meine ungehörigen Träume* (1978), *Der Lauf der Dinge* (1982) and *Lichtverhältnisse* (1988),⁸ where dreams, fairy tales characters, fantastic elements and irony serve either to highlight the false mechanisms hindering the development of scientific work or to explore new ways for women to fulfil themselves.

⁷ According to this theory, which characterised the GDR cultural scene of the 1950s, literature should represent the objective reality in its revolutionary development and aim to educate the workers in a socialist sense. Works written along the guidelines of Socialist Realism are supposed to deal with issues related to the socialist production processes and present positive heroes with the function of providing the readers with characters with which they can identify, but also with models of socialist virtue they can imitate. See Emmerich, W., *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1997), 118-124.

⁸ Königsdorf, H., *Meine ungehörigen Träume: Geschichten* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1990), first published in 1978. Hereafter: MT. Königsdorf, H., *Der Lauf der Dinge: Geschichten* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1982). Hereafter: LD. Königsdorf, H., *Lichtverhältnisse: Geschichten* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1988). Hereafter: LV.

Although her novels written in the 1980s still contain traces of the initial playfulness with reality characterising the short stories, here her tone becomes much more serious. Her concern with women's issues develops into the desire to promote through her literature the fulfilment of each individual, whether man or woman, within society; her preoccupation with the bureaucratic and corrupted GDR scientific establishment evolves into a more general form of commitment to challenge any scientific development which goes against the dignity of the individual. Thus, given the proportions reached by the ecological disaster in the 1980s and the fact that in those years the survival of mankind was constantly under threat of a nuclear confrontation between East and West, in *Respektloser Umgang* (1986) and *Ungelegener Befund* (1990)⁹ Königsdorf could not limit herself to addressing issues just concerning the reality of the GDR, as this was the time to start thinking in global terms. In this sense, these novels are exemplary of one of the main modes of East German literature produced especially in the second half of the Honecker era, that of viewing the literary work as a means of criticising modern civilisation (*Zivilisationskritik*). In fact, they offer an exhaustive discussion on the role which science should play within our societies, try to define the responsibility of scientists towards their research and critically examine society's attitude vis-à-vis science and progress. The critical elements these works display and the warnings of an imminent apocalypse are counterbalanced by the hopeful idea that it is not too late to change the situation. The message is that when everybody aspires to it, change is certainly possible.¹⁰

⁹ Königsdorf, H., *Respektloser Umgang: Erzählung* (Frankfurt/M.: Luchterhand, 1988), first published in 1986. Hereafter: RU. Königsdorf, H., *Ungelegener Befund: Briefroman* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1990). Hereafter: UB. Since the latter was published in 1990 but written in 1989, I discuss it together with the works written in the GDR era.

¹⁰ See for instance Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1969), Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (1972), Irmtraud Morgner's *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz* (1974) and Volker Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte* (1975). Attention is drawn to the

Respektloser Umgang and *Ungelegener Befund* are also works aimed at remembering (*Erinnerungsarbeit*). They reflect the need which became visible in the literature of the 1970s and 1980s to come to terms with the Second World War, after the GDR had made the confrontation with the Nazi crimes appear redundant by declaring itself an anti-fascist country, inhabited by resistance heroes. Especially in *Respektloser Umgang*, Königsdorf deals with the Nazi past in a very personal way. Here she even fictionalises the story of the Jewish side of her family, a remarkable undertaking if one considers that in most of the literature produced in the GDR with the intention of facing up to the horrors of the Third Reich Jewish issues tend to remain marginal.

Although in retrospect Königsdorf defined her commitment to socialism and her faith in the possibility of reforming the GDR as *Heileweltinszenierung*,¹¹ it remains the driving force behind all her pre-1989 works and her motivation to continue writing. In this light, it should not come as a surprise if Königsdorf, like many other intellectuals who despite not agreeing with the repressive line of the Party had retained their hope in the socialist utopia, welcomed the ‘peaceful Revolution’ as the opportunity finally to reform society. It was only as a result of the March elections of 1990 and the vote for unification that she saw herself as having to revise her position and accept that this was not going to be the new beginning she had hoped for. Made more fractious by the so-called *deutsche-deutsche Literaturstreit* (the German-German literature dispute), sparked off by the attacks on the integrity of left-wing intellectuals in both East and West Germany,¹² the process of integration into unified Germany

optimistic aspect of these works by Wolfgang Emmerich in his *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* [see note 7 above].

¹¹ This expression is used by the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* to describe the attitude of people who supported socialism. See Königsdorf, H., *Gleich neben Afrika: Erzählung* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1992), 98. Hereafter: GA.

¹² The German-German literature dispute was caused by Christa Wolf’s decision to publish in 1990 a book she had started writing in 1979, *Was bleibt*, in which she recounts her experience of living under the surveillance of state security. Christa Wolf’s work was criticised in the Western

was for most former GDR intellectuals, including Königsdorf, very difficult and painful. Her efforts to try and come to terms with the recent changes form the material collected in the two volumes *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* (1990) and *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen* (1990).¹³

While there were many other Eastern German intellectuals who decided to put together the material they produced during 1989-90 in various collections,¹⁴ Königsdorf went one step further, reviving one of the genres which had gained popularity in the GDR in the 1970s: documentary literature. By compiling two sets of interviews with Eastern German citizens, the first *Adieu DDR* (1990) which focuses on the interviewees' experience of life in the GDR and the 'peaceful Revolution', and a later one, *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* (1995),¹⁵ on their experience of life after unification, Königsdorf assumed a role similar to that of the historian and delivered in this way an invaluable contribution to the study of this historical period.

A certain documentary quality can also be found in her first post-unification fictional works, *Gleich neben Afrika* (1992) and *Im Schatten*

German press because it seemed an anachronistic attempt to shed light on the repressive measures adopted by the SED regime, which could have been of far more importance during the GDR era, even if it would have probably meant Wolf's expulsion from the country. Wolf's work was only the first spark of a debate which from June 1990 to the spring of 1991 developed around the dilemma of loyalty faced by left-wing intellectuals in both East and West Germany who, because of their subservience to the socialist ideology, compromised their integrity by not overtly opposing the GDR's undemocratic regime. I also mention the literary debate in section 3.1.

¹³ For the publication details of MS, see note 5 above. Königsdorf, H., *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen: Aufsätze und Reden* (Hamburg: Luchterhand, 1990). Hereafter: DC.

¹⁴ Other examples of non-fictional works produced in this period are Christoph Hein's *Die fünfte Grundrechenart* (1990) and *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* (1990), Christa Wolf's *Reden im Herbst* (1990), Heiner Müller's *Zur Lage der Nation* (1990), Wolf Biermann's *Über das Geld und andere Herzensdinge: Prosaische Versuche über Deutschland* (1991), Günter Kunert's *Der Sturz vom Sockel* (1992) and Monika Maron's *Nach Maßgabe meiner Begreifungskraft* (1993).

¹⁵ Königsdorf, H., *Adieu DDR: Protokolle eines Abschieds* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1990). Hereafter: AD. Königsdorf, H., *Unterwegs nach Deutschland. Über die Schwierigkeiten, ein Volk zu sein: Protokolle eines Aufbruchs* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1995). Hereafter: UD.

des Regenbogens (1993),¹⁶ which portray life after 1990 in the new federal states. While in this period many ex-GDR authors wrote autobiographies in response to their desire to shed light on real life conditions in the GDR,¹⁷ Königsdorf continued to combine autobiographical and fictional elements in these two novels which are examples of what Wolfgang Emmerich has described as a new form of *Heimatliteratur* ('literature conveying a sense of home').¹⁸ He uses this term to categorise works offering a means of identification for Eastern German citizens and displaying the difficulty their authors have in dropping those communicative functions of literature that had a specific *raison d'être* within the GDR's cultural discourse but not necessarily within that of unified Germany.

With the publication of *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* in 1994,¹⁹ a collection of texts dealing with various contemporary problems, Königsdorf demonstrated her willingness to remain involved in the discussion of current issues within the intellectual scene. This discussion continues in her latest novel, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* (1997),²⁰ which deals with the problem of the elderly in our society. As this work does not display traces of nostalgia for the past, but concerns itself with some of the real problems of present-day German society, it represents a real progression from the previous two novels and shows that Königsdorf is on her way to re-defining her literary identity in a well-balanced synthesis of old and new elements.

¹⁶ For the publication details of GA, see note 11 above. Königsdorf, H., *Im Schatten des Regenbogens: Roman* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1993). Hereafter: SR.

¹⁷ Examples of autobiographies written in the post-unification years by former GDR authors are de Bruyn's very successful *Zwischenbilanz: Eine Jugend in Berlin* (1992), followed by *Vierzig Jahre: Ein Lebensbericht* (1996) and Günter Kunert's *Erwachsenenspiele: Erinnerungen* (1997).

¹⁸ Emmerich, W., *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, 503. I give Emmerich's full definition of *Heimatliteratur* in section 5.3.

¹⁹ Königsdorf, H., *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt: Essays* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1994). Hereafter: RW.

²⁰ Königsdorf, H., *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter: Roman* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1997). Hereafter: EG.

Königsdorf's latest publication, *Der gewöhnliche Wahnsinn* (1998),²¹ is a selection of her pre-1989 short stories augmented by a solitary new one which gives the entire collection its title. Hence, Königsdorf, who started her literary career by writing short stories, has returned to this genre in her latest work. Her faltering inspiration is most probably due to her worsening health - Königsdorf has been suffering from Parkinson's disease since 1974, but it has become increasingly debilitating in the past few years.

0.2 Aim of the Thesis

Since a comprehensive study of Helga Königsdorf's writings, outlining her literary development from the beginning of her career to the publication of her latest work, has yet to be carried out, the aim of the thesis is to fill this gap. As Königsdorf is one of the most important of the GDR women authors²² who published before, during and after the 'peaceful Revolution', the investigation of her writings seems important not just because of her work's intrinsic aesthetic value, but also because it reflects the evolution of intellectual and literary discourse during the very significant years which saw the disappearance of the GDR and the subsequent unification of the two Germanies.

This thesis also aims to redress the fact that, although during the GDR era²³ Königsdorf's short stories and novels were published in both East and West Germany, her work in its entirety, especially with regard to her post-unification writings, has remained largely unrecognised. After

²¹ Königsdorf, H., *Der gewöhnliche Wahnsinn: Die besten Geschichten* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbücher, 1998).

²² In her article 'Adieu Cassandra? Schriftstellerinnen aus der DDR vor, in und nach der Wende: Brigitte Burmeister, Helga Königsdorf, Helga Schütz, Brigitte Struzyk, Rosemarie Zeplin', Eva Kaufmann relates Helga Königsdorf's work to that of the other four authors mentioned in her title as examples of creative continuity. This article appeared in Boa, E. and Wharton, J. (eds), *Women and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections of the German Unification Process*, *German Monitor* 31 (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994), 216-225.

²³ During the GDR era Königsdorf was awarded important literary prizes: for example in 1985 she won the *Heinrich-Mann-Preis* and in 1989 the *Nationalpreis, II Klasse*.

conducting a study based on Wolfgang Emmerich's *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, in which Königsdorf's name is mentioned only four times, Ricarda Schmidt drew the conclusion that Königsdorf's work had not been sufficiently considered even during the GDR years.²⁴ In 1992 Brigid Haines too was insisting that Königsdorf's works written up until 1989 had not been adequately explored, for, in her opinion, many aspects of them had been neglected.²⁵ She argued that while there were many feminist and autobiographical readings of her pre-1989 writings, critics had failed to notice that, as her work became longer and more complex, it also started resisting over-simplified categorising. Haines was the only critic who, for example, attempted a post-structuralist approach in her analysis of Königsdorf's pre-unification works, in which she explored themes that up until that point had only received cursory attention, such as the GDR specificity of *Respektloser Umgang* or the discussion of gender issues contained in *Ungelegener Befund*. In this regard, another work which deserves mentioning is Paul O'Doherty's *The Portrayal of Jews in GDR Prose Fiction*,²⁶ which underlines the significance of the Jewish dimension of *Respektloser Umgang*, normally ignored by reviewers and critics.

However, the problem is not just that an over-simplified approach to her work has often prevented its richness from being appreciated, but also that it has suffered from lack of attention in the post-unification years, in which Königsdorf has continued to be very prolific. This is reflected by

²⁴ See Schmidt, R., 'Im Schatten der Titanin: Minor GDR Women Writers – Justly Neglected, Unrecognised or Repressed?', in Goodbody, A. and Tate, D. (eds), *Geist und Macht* [see note 3 above], 151-162. Her study is based on the 1989 edition of Emmerich's *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*. In his later revised and expanded edition, which appeared in 1997, Königsdorf is mentioned seven times: twice in the chapter dealing with the literary development of East Germany in the 1980s and five times in the chapter on the transformation of the cultural scene within unified Germany from 1989 to 1995.

²⁵ See Haines, B., 'Botschaft aus einem seltsamen Land: Helga Königsdorf and Her Critics', in Goodbody, A. and Tate, D. (eds), *Geist und Macht* [see note 3 above], 140-150.

²⁶ See O'Doherty, P., *The Portrayal of Jews in GDR Prose Fiction* (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), 235-241.

the fact that most of the secondary literature available on Königsdorf does not go beyond 1990. While literary critics such as Brigid Haines or Margy Gerber²⁷ have made valuable attempts to throw light on the complexity of Königsdorf's works and re-evaluate them retrospectively immediately after unification, their studies only cover the period from 1978 to 1990. Alternatively, other important contributions, for instance those by Jean Conacher, Elizabeth Mittman and again Brigid Haines,²⁸ focus specifically on the role that Königsdorf played during the 'peaceful Revolution', emphasising her dynamism and flexibility in accepting the changes, but were written too early to give an idea of her evolution during the 1990s.

Hence, while there is a considerable body of secondary literature on Königsdorf's pre-1989 works, especially on *Respektloser Umgang*, and, as mentioned above, some attempts have been made to analyse her works written in the GDR era retrospectively, in general her post-unification novels and non-fictional works seem to have been neglected. In this respect, the only exceptions are Georgina Paul, who, in an article on lesbian literature produced before and after 1989-90, deals with the lesbian strand in *Gleich neben Afrika* and Dennis Tate, who analyses the element of *Ostalgie* - the term used to indicate feelings of nostalgia for the former GDR - in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*.²⁹ The only critic who has

²⁷ For details on Haines's work see note 25 above. Gerber M., 'Impertinence, Productive Fear and Hope: The Writings of Helga Königsdorf', in Kane, M. (ed.), *Socialism and the Literary Imagination* (New York; Oxford: Berg, 1991), 179-193.

²⁸ See Conacher, E. J., 'Pressing for Change: The Case of Helga Königsdorf', in Boa, E. and Wharton, J. (eds), *Women and the Wende* [see note 22 above], 164-176, Mittman, E., 'Locating a Public Sphere: Some Reflections on Writers and Öffentlichkeit in the GDR', in Clausen, J. and Friedrichsmeyer, S. (eds), *Women in German Yearbook 10: Feminist Studies of German Literature and Culture* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 19-37 and Haines, B., 'Aber jetzt wird geplaudert: Helga Königsdorf und die sanfte Revolution', *Politics & Society in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1991, 55-60.

²⁹ See Paul, G., 'Über Verschwiegenges sprechen: Female Homosexuality and the Public Sphere in the GDR before and after the *Wende*', in Boa, E. and Wharton, J. (eds), *Women and the Wende* [see note 22 above], 226-237 and Tate, D., 'Trapped in the Past? The Identity Problems of East German Writers since the *Wende*', in Hahn, H. J. (ed.), *Germany in the 1990s, German Monitor 34* (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 1-16.

followed Königsdorf's literary evolution from the beginning of her literary career into the post-unification era is Eva Kaufmann.³⁰ Nevertheless, although she has reviewed most of Königsdorf's works individually, including her most recent ones, Kaufmann too has never produced an overall outline of all her works. The exceptions are two more comprehensive reviews which however were respectively published as early as 1991 and 1993 and therefore do not include Königsdorf's latest writings.³¹

In the light of this scarcity of secondary material on Königsdorf's post-unification literary development, I have taken into consideration the numerous press reviews which have been published, above all after the appearance of *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*. Although press reviews are indisputably not as sophisticated as academic secondary literature, they nevertheless reflect the first reactions to the works of an author who is trying to adjust herself to a changed cultural framework. Especially in view of the role which the press had played during the German-German literature dispute and the importance it has acquired in the new federal states as a result of the transformation of the public sphere in 1989-90, I felt it was relevant to take into account in my analysis the kind of reception given to her most recent works in order to gain a better

³⁰ This is a list of Eva Kaufmann's reviews on Königsdorf's works which clearly shows that she followed her career from the beginning to the publication of her latest novel *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*: Kaufmann, E., 'Helga Königsdorfs Band "Meine ungehörigen Träume"', *Weimarer Beiträge*, Vol. 25, No. 7, 1979, 109-113, 'Haltung nehmen: Zu Helga Königsdorfs Erzählung "Respektloser Umgang"', in Rönisch, S. (ed.), *DDR-Literatur '86 im Gespräch* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1987), 278-287, 'Von Sach- und anderen Zwängen: Zu Helga Königsdorfs Erzählungsband "Lichtverhältnisse"', in Rönisch, S. (ed.), *DDR-Literatur '88 im Gespräch* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1989), 241-248, 'Hellsichtige Diagnose', *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, Vol. 38, No. 9, 1990, 129-132, 'Erzählen aus Nahdistanz', *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, Vol. 41, No. 11, 1993, 129-131, 'Rette sich wer kann', *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 1997, 129-131.

³¹ See Kaufmann, E., 'Spielarten des Komischen: Zur Schreibweise von Helga Königsdorf', in Stephan, I. et al. (eds), *Wen kümmert's, wer spricht: Zur Literatur und Kulturgeschichte von Frauen aus Ost und West* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991), 177-184 and 'Laudatio für Helga Königsdorf', *Das Argument* 199, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1993, 405-408.

understanding of the cultural climate in which Eastern German writers have had to work after unification.

0.3 The Approach and Terminology Adopted

In order to understand the complexity and the evolution of Königsdorf's profile and capture the many facets of her works, I have singled out five different main aspects of her literary identity: as a woman, a scientist, an intellectual, a citizen and a creative writer. The evolution of each of these identities is examined separately in the five parallel chapters of the thesis. Each chapter analyses the relative significance of Königsdorf's GDR experience, her provisional responses to the years 1989-90, and her more considered post-unification stances, allowing a differentiated picture of the development of each identity over this complex era of transition to emerge.

The concept of identity has recently become the focus of much academic discourse in such areas as communication, sociology, psychology, education, politics and others. The discursive explosion of the concept of identity in recent years is largely due to the diverse meanings it can assume. Hence, in academic as well as in everyday speech, identity can be qualified as personal, sexual, local, ethnic, group, collective, national, etc. The malleability of the concept of identity is mainly a consequence of the deconstructing process undertaken in various disciplines which have criticised the fixed, unified and integral idea of identity. From the pre-Cartesian model of identity conceived as a unity and 'a precondition for authoritative and reliable truth-seeking activity',³² it is now widely accepted that identity is instead 'fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions'.³³ This

³² Gilroy, P., 'Diaspora and The Detours of Identity', in Woodward, K., (ed.), *Identity and Difference* (London: Sage, 1997), 301-343 (here 314).

³³ Hall, S., 'Who Needs "Identity"?', in Hall, S. and Gay, P. du, (eds), *Questions of Cultural*

new way of interpreting identity was initiated by the critique of the self as knowable and unified, an assumption challenged by Sigmund Freud's introduction of the 'unconscious'. Later, after 1968, a new wave of thinkers, among them Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser,³⁴ gave a new impetus to theories underlining the idea of identity as fragmented, unknowable and unfixed.

In the last few decades, the term identity has also appeared in processes of reassertion of identity by marginalised groups on a political level, a phenomenon normally referred to as 'identity politics'. In these processes, the definition of identity adopted is grounded in different approaches. By arguing that identity is defined by biological and natural factors, the essentialist approach, for instance, precludes the possibility that identity might be influenced by historical changes. 'Social constructionism', by contrast, stresses the impact of socio-cultural conditions on the structures of subjectivity, while another approach focuses on identity as being defined by otherness and difference.³⁵ Furthermore, in the light of the recent socio-political transformations which have considerably altered the way of living and thinking of the last few years, identity has also been analysed in connection to concepts such as post-communism, globalisation and in association with ideas of scientific advances and development of information technology.

The widespread concern with identity reflects in essence the need to understand 'the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which the fragile subjective is formed'.³⁶ The object of my thesis, however, is not an

Identity (London: Sage, 1996), 1-17 (here 4).

³⁴ For a discussion of the theories of Freud, Althusser and Lacan, see Woodward, K., 'Concepts of Identity and Difference', in Woodward, K., (ed.), *Identity and Difference*, 8-61 (esp. 42-46), [see note 32 above].

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-38.

³⁶ Guilroy, P., 'Diaspora and The Detours of Identity', in Woodward, K., (ed.), *Identity and Difference* 301 [see note 32 above].

exploration of how subjects are positioned in a context and of the meanings they extract from this context to define themselves. If that were the case, it would be necessary to take into consideration the subjective level, while I am mainly interested in the profile of the author Helga Königsdorf exclusively as it is reflected by her writings and how these, and not the real individual, are affected by the social and political changes which she experiences. Since my use of the term 'identity' does not imply subjectivity, but simply indicates the various aspects forming Königsdorf's literary profile, I do not base my thesis on specific theories and interpretations of identity. Although it is undeniable that Königsdorf's literary identity cannot be separated from her subjectivity, my analysis is nevertheless specifically focused on the manner in which social, political and personal experiences are reflected in her literary production; it does not aim to penetrate through the layers of her writings in order to reconstruct her personal identity or her authentic profile as an individual.

Hence, what I intend to undertake here is to offer different readings of Königsdorf's writings by choosing each time a different perspective which I call 'identity' and to look at how she evolves on a literary level within that given framework. For this reason, it is not possible to provide an all-embracing definition of identity. Instead, within each chapter I will define the perspective or identity adopted in order to set the parameters of my investigation. In this way, I hope to present a comprehensive picture of Königsdorf's literary profile by exploring the specificity of its main five aspects.

Although the five identities forming Königsdorf's literary profile cannot be captured under a single definition, in my interpretation of the term identity I nevertheless maintain the connotation of identity as something which is not fixed, but always in process. The five identities selected present in fact a common characteristic: they all evolve. Within

each identity the focus is therefore on the manner in which this develops over time and in response to the historical changes which transformed German reality in 1989-90. Consequently, all five of them involve movement, renegotiation, are exposed to external impositions and even destruction. In other words, they have to be continuously adjusted to any social and environmental factors.

Königsdorf's herself, in the attempt to articulate her understanding of the concept of identity in the aftermath of the 'peaceful Revolution', stressed the dynamic aspect of it:

Die Identität eines Menschen ist ein inneres und ein äußeres Bild im Wechsel, ein Kompromiß zwischen Rollenangebot und eigener Regie. Es ist die Identität innerhalb einer Gemeinschaft. (DC, 84)

Although Königsdorf's definition refers to individual identity and how this is shaped by external impulses coming from a given social context, it nevertheless needs mentioning because it gives us an idea of her openness to change. Königsdorf's own biography and especially her decision to start writing at the age of forty attests to her readiness to welcome change and renewal. As she reached a period in her life in which the communication skills which she had acquired up until then had become unsatisfactory, she had the courage to look for self-fulfilment in an entirely new discipline: literature. At this stage she had already been working several years in the Academy of Sciences and built up for herself a very good reputation as a mathematician. All the same, her apparently stable lifestyle did not prevent her from embarking on a completely new project. This decision was followed by a more radical one in 1990 when she left her job as a mathematician and started dedicating herself full-time to literature.

Königsdorf's openness to change is reflected by her literary work which continues to evolve in response to the transformations which she

experiences on a subjective level and is therefore marked by dynamism. Since the way in which social and personal changes have a repercussion on her literary production is the object of this thesis, I do not undertake an aesthetic consideration of Königsdorf's works. Instead, I concentrate on the effects of the different changes she experiences on her approach to literature. This means that I mainly focus on the development of her understanding of her role as a writer and the function of literature and the evolution of her approach to the readership in the light of how external events influence her positions.

Apart from the personal changes mentioned above, the historical moment when she had to undergo an all-embracing renegotiation of her positions is the period following the collapse of the GDR. This time is central to all of the five perspectives examined here as it was when she had to re-assess her ideas and adjust them to the changed external situation. As the challenges confronting Königsdorf in this period were of a different nature, it is relevant to make these distinctions when analysing how she reacted to them. Thus, some of the changes Königsdorf had to go through were imposed on her, others were necessary for her integration into the changed environment or even willingly accepted and welcomed. This had the consequence that some aspects of her identity were preserved, such as her identity as a woman or as a scientist, others dropped, such as her identity as a GDR citizen and a supporter of socialism, or modified, for example her identity as a creative writer, and new ones discovered, such as her identity as a politically independent intellectual.

Among the most difficult impositions Königsdorf had to face was without doubt having to accept the disappearance of the GDR, drop her identity as a GDR citizen and start seeing herself as a citizen of unified Germany. Königsdorf, who had never stopped considering the GDR as

the site of her utopian longing, had always worked both as a writer and a scientist towards the improvement of East Germany in the hope that her country could be turned into the just and egalitarian society she was aspiring to. This generated in her a strong sense of belonging to the GDR, which she regarded as her home. The difficulty of no longer identifying with the GDR was also a consequence of the fact that she was born in 1938 and therefore had no pre-war experience of unified Germany. By contrast, she was part of that generation which tried to move away from the horrors of fascism by embracing socialism.

A necessary re-assessment leading to change within Königsdorf's identity was provoked by the discredit into which socialism fell in 1989-90, especially when the extent of the corruption of the SED and its repressive methods became known. The various scandals surrounding the SED, the revelations about the State Security Service (*Staatssicherheitsdienst*, normally referred to as *Stasi*), the fact that the majority of Eastern Germans voted for unification were all events which propelled Königsdorf to re-evaluate her political identity. This process of re-evaluation underwent two main phases. At first Königsdorf, who was a member of the SED and a supporter of the project of a 'Third Way' democratic socialism during the 'peaceful Revolution', continued to be politically active by becoming a member of the PDS and even presenting herself as a candidate for the elections in 1990. However, in a second phase she reconsidered her political position and left the PDS. Although she remained concerned for the welfare of mankind, after unification she became a politically independent intellectual.

The changes which Königsdorf could not but welcome were those concerning the transformation of the public sphere, which suddenly gave the opportunity to Eastern German authors to speak openly without having to fear being silenced by censorship or even more repressive measures.

However, while she was able to take full advantage of the new opportunities suddenly open to her by publishing a lot of non-fictional material and newspaper articles, the phase of adjustment to the changed cultural scene took a while. It was only after some time that Königsdorf managed to accommodate the old and new features of her literary identity, accept the difficulty of having to publish in a market economy and internalise the new cultural framework in which she was writing.

The order in which the various identities are here presented is based on the nature of the impact of the changes of 1989-90 on them and Königsdorf's reactions. Thus, the chapters on Königsdorf's identity as a woman and as a scientist are placed at the beginning of the thesis because these two identities develop steadily throughout Königsdorf's literary career. The events of 1989-90 had the effect of fostering positively their evolution by enabling Königsdorf to explore subjects which were virtually taboo under the SED regime, such as lesbianism, and employ non-fictional genres to discuss her ideas, some of which had started emerging during the GDR years. The central chapter is formed by Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual which from many points of view represents a new beginning. It was in fact at this time that Königsdorf could evolve into a non-fiction writer by making her voice heard through the mass media. Diametrically opposed is the development of her identity as a citizen since Königsdorf was forced to give up her GDR identity to take on that of citizen of unified Germany. Hence, while Königsdorf welcomed the opportunity of reconstructing her intellectual identity by starting afresh, it was with great pain that she had to accept the loss of her identity as a GDR citizen. The chapter dealing with Königsdorf's identity as a creative writer is located at the end of the thesis because it entails a process of transformation and re-definition, in which old and new elements of her literary identity come together in a new synthesis, thus summarising many aspects of Königsdorf's identity previously mentioned.

0.4 Brief Outline of the Chapters of the Thesis

In Chapter One I discuss Königsdorf's identity as a woman. This emerges especially in the first years of her career, as is shown by the fact that many of her pre-1989 short stories deal with women's issues. It was in particular these stories which attracted the attention of literary critics in the West with the regrettable result that Königsdorf was hastily classified as a feminist writer. However, as she has always preferred to describe herself as a humanist writer, in discussing her works on gender-related issues I insist on the fact that they are based on her experience as a woman and her desire to gain and at the same time stimulate a better understanding of the position of women within her society. Her humanist approach is demonstrated by the fact that her portrayal of the difficulty specifically faced by women in a patriarchal society is only one aspect of a more general discussion launched by Königsdorf on the pressure existing within the GDR to conform. In response to this repression of individuality, Königsdorf suggests in *Respektloser Umgang* that everybody, whether man or woman, should be given the opportunity to find his/her own place in society without the pressure of having to measure up to standards imposed from outside.

As the disappearance of the GDR had the effect of giving more freedom to the authors to deal with subject matters of their own choice, Königsdorf grasped this opportunity and developed an homosexual strand in one of her main post-unification novels, *Gleich neben Afrika*, thus exploring an area in which, although homosexuality was considered virtually taboo during the GDR, she had already manifested interest with the novel *Ungelegener Befund*. As Königsdorf became increasingly familiar with the new society, she also returned to dealing with more typically gender-related problems. In *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, for instance, Königsdorf illustrates the frustration of a middle-aged housewife having to cope with an old grandmother, a husband whom she no longer

loves, children she cannot communicate with and the general regret of having sacrificed her ambitions to the family.

The second chapter focuses on Königsdorf's identity as a scientist and it aims to explore the way in which the fact that she studied physics and then specialised in mathematics is reflected in her work. During the GDR years, her familiarity with the East German scientific environment provided her with many of the characters and settings she portrays in her short stories. Towards the mid-eighties when the exploitation of nuclear energy for political purposes and the danger they represented to the survival of mankind made it impossible to take things lightly, her ironical and sarcastic tone started becoming increasingly serious, as is shown by her two novels, *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*. Here she carries out the discussion of very important issues, such as the responsibility of scientists vis-à-vis their research, which she investigates by drawing a parallel to how science was misused during the Second World War. She also attempts to re-define modern society's relationship to science by stressing that in everything we undertake respect for human dignity should always be our final goal.

Although 1990 was a turning point in her career as a mathematician since that was when she retired from the Academy of Sciences and started dedicating herself full-time to literature, her concern with scientific progress remained constant throughout her literary development. The events of 1989-90 had the effect of strengthening her view on the respect of dignity as the main yardstick for conducting scientific research. They also opened up for Königsdorf the possibility of dealing with science through non-fiction, as is shown in the years after unification by her prolific production of newspaper articles on themes related to the development of science. With regard to Königsdorf's post-1990 fiction, it is interesting to note that in novels such as *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*

and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* she deals with a still unexplored aspect of her scientific background. Although she has always admitted to her dissatisfaction with the restricted possibilities to communicate offered by mathematics, it is only in these novels that she portrays the difficulties of mathematicians in coping with their emotions.

The concept of dignity emerging from Königsdorf's scientific identity also plays a central role in her re-assessment of the GDR and the process of unification since, in this case as well, it is the yardstick she adopts in order to judge the situation. Königsdorf's reflections on the events of 1989-90 and her personal contributions to intellectual life in the GDR, during and after the 'peaceful Revolution' are presented in Chapter Three, which focuses on her identity as an intellectual. Here I introduce Königsdorf's understanding of her role as an intellectual during the GDR era in order to be able to assess the extent to which she had to adapt to the transformation of the cultural scene. I do so by taking into account her non-fictional writings of the years 1989-90 collected in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* and *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen*. Part of this discussion is also Königsdorf's re-consideration of her political identity from the time when she was an active supporter of socialism until she decided to disassociate herself from all political parties.

The way in which unification took place and the fear that not much would be left of the emotions which accompanied the 'peaceful Revolution' gradually convinced Königsdorf that she had a role to play in collecting material recounting the events of 1989-90 from a human point of view. This is part of the reason why she put together *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*, a collage of personal letters, poems and various texts marking the various phases leading to unification and also why she collected two volumes of interviews with Eastern German citizens, *Adieu DDR* in 1990 and *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* in 1995. The new image

of Königsdorf's intellectual identity as politically independent but morally concerned emerges also in her post-unification essays and articles, collected under the title *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, in which she maintains a critical approach to society's development and a pronounced interest in the welfare of mankind.

While the new opportunities opened up by the 'peaceful Revolution' enabled Königsdorf to regenerate her intellectual identity, her experience of unification and her subsequent loss of identity as a GDR citizen, which is the subject matter of Chapter Four, was less positive. After analysing Königsdorf's sense of belonging to the GDR, by taking into account her Jewish and social background and her membership of the Party, I concentrate on the identity crisis which she suffered after the disappearance of the GDR. This forced her into a complex process of re-definition of her concept of home, which went through different phases before she was actually able to gain a feeling of belonging to unified Germany. These include a journey back to Thuringia (*Thüringen*), the region where Königsdorf originally comes from, and the investigation of political concepts such as internationalism understood as the sense of belonging to the world as opposed to a specific country, which she alternates with the idea of creating smaller communities to fight against alienation. Although I mainly base my analysis of Königsdorf's identity as a citizen on her non-fictional writings, I also take into consideration her novels, *Respektloser Umgang*, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, as indirectly reflecting her sense of belonging. In particular, I consider the novel *Gleich neben Afrika* for it presents a highly autobiographically based main character who is also trying to cope with an identity crisis caused by the collapse of the GDR.

The identity crisis provoked by the loss of her GDR citizenship was part of the process of adjustment to the new cultural framework within

which Königsdorf found herself having to operate after 1989. On the way to re-defining her profile as a creative writer, she encountered many difficulties in dropping a specific Eastern German perspective. Yet, despite her disorientation and confusion, Königsdorf wrote fewer short stories and produced novels instead - probably because after leaving the Academy of Sciences she had a larger amount of time at her disposal - and persevered in her attempt to adjust to the cultural discourse within unified Germany.

Königsdorf's process of re-definition of her literary identity is the focus of Chapter Five. Here I assess the impact of the collapse of the GDR on her conception of literature and her evolution as a creative writer as this emerges from her fiction. In order to do so, I compare the novels she wrote during the GDR years, in particular *Respektloser Umgang*, to those which appeared after unification, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*. This enables me to examine how the disorientation brought about by the feeling of unfamiliarity with the new environment influenced her creative writing. After having analysed the way in which her pre-1989 works are typical of the literary discourse in the GDR, I look at the elements that Königsdorf's post-unification novels have in common with the ones written during the GDR, such as the conception of literature as *Ersatzöffentlichkeit*³⁷ and as a provider of aid to living (*Lebenshilfe*). Secondly, I investigate those characteristics which reflect the climate of confusion of the post-unification years. Thus, the self-confident and challenging tone of Königsdorf's pre-1989 works becomes much more resigned in her post-unification novels, the importance of coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) suddenly no longer refers to the Second World War but to the more recent

³⁷ As the GDR never had a critical press, literature took over many of the functions which journalism should have fulfilled and in this sense performed the role of a substitute for the media. This created the expectation in the readers to find in novels, plays and poems the discussion of topics of social relevance.

GDR past, and the importance of defending the individual in a socialist society is replaced by the importance of sticking together as a group in an individualistic society. The findings of my analysis are then adopted as the starting point for evaluating the extent to which Königsdorf has managed to re-define her identity in her latest novel, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*.

Chapter One

Helga Königsdorf's Identity as a Woman

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter it is my aim to explore Helga Königsdorf's identity as a woman writer, that is to analyse her women-centred fiction as well as all her works dealing with gender issues. Although she has often been classified as a feminist writer,¹ I would like to specify that this is not the manner in which I intend to present her work. My main reasons for rejecting this perspective are the following: first of all, this is not how she views herself and her work. Secondly, I believe that a close reading of her texts reveals that to label them as 'feminist' is without doubt limiting, as the issues she discusses are wide-ranging and centred around the well-being of mankind as a whole, and not solely around that of women. In this sense, the line of thought she adopts is best described by the expression used by Königsdorf herself: 'Individualhumanismus' (RU, 20), which Werner Jehser has explained as 'die Sensibilisierung des *einzelnen* für die wesentlichsten Anliegen der menschlichen Gattung'.² Her final aim is in fact to encourage her readers, regardless of their gender, to liberate themselves and find fulfilment in their lives. This is confirmed by how she expressed herself on the issue of the emancipation of women:

Vielleicht sind die Frauen etwas mehr im Aufbruch, die Schilderung der Männer ist statischer. Aber auch das entspricht der Wirklichkeit. Das Rollenbild der Frau hat sich in den letzten Jahren stark verbreitert, während der Mann mehr auf Überkommenes festgelegt ist. Aber bei allem, was noch offen

¹ The feminist label for Königsdorf's work was used as a marketing strategy by her Western publisher Luchterhand to promote a selection of her women-centred short stories – the scientific satires were omitted – which appeared under the title *Mit Klischmann im Regen* (Darmstadt; Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1983). Luchterhand proclaimed her 'ein neues weibliches Talent aus der DDR' and compared her to Irmtraud Morgner: 'So souverän, so ungeniert, mit lächelnder und zugleich finsterner Überlegenheit hat nach Irmtraud Morgner noch keine Autorin die Seiten verkehrt, das heißt, den Mann in den Objektstand verwiesen und sich selbst in den des Subjekts eingesetzt'. Brigid Haines makes this point in her article 'Botschaft aus einem seltsamen Land' [see note 25 of the Introduction], 142.

² Jehser, W., "Respektloser Umgang" von Helga Königsdorf: Für und Wider', *Weimarer Beiträge*, Vol. 33, No. 8, 1987, 1338-1357 (here 1343).

ist, was noch zu klären ist zwischen Mann und Frau, geht es mir doch in erster Linie um die Emanzipation des Menschen.³

Königsdorf's concern for the emancipation of mankind is furthermore demonstrated by the fact that all her pre-1989 short stories, normally divided into scientific satires⁴ and stories on gender relations, deal in fact with the same theme, that is the necessity to live according to one's own individuality, independently of societal conventions and expectations - which is also the final message of her novels *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*. The source of inspiration is also the same: both groups of stories are based on Königsdorf's personal experience, whether as a woman, a scientist, or as a human being.

Regarding one's own experience as the touchstone for what is real was not at all exceptional in the GDR. The official Socialist Realism⁵ used as a means of illustrating certain fixed truths soon revealed itself to be too static and rigid in the face of man's constant need to discover and explore. Moreover, as the gap between the proclaimed truths, such as the achievement of women's emancipation, and reality became wider and wider, it was no longer possible for serious intellectuals to continue proclaiming a bright future for their socialist country while ignoring the shortcomings affecting the GDR's development. With regard to gender issues, for instance, it became the task of writers to initiate a discourse on women's issues, which had never been tackled despite the GDR's official claim that women had been emancipated since the founding of the state. In reality, the kind of emancipation they enjoyed is best defined as *Scheinemanzipation*⁶ ('pseudo emancipation'). In fact, while it is true that

³ 'Gedankentäterin', interview with Zimmermann, B. and Frölich, U., *Wochenpost*, 30.12.1988.

⁴ These are discussed in detail in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

⁵ For an explanation of Socialist Realism, see footnote 7 of the Introduction.

⁶ This term was used by Dinah Dodds in her article, 'Women in East Germany: Emancipation or Exploitation?', in Boa, E. and Wharton, J. (eds), *Women and the Wende* [see note 22 of the Introduction], 107-114 (here 107).

women were accorded equal rights to men, a change in attitudes towards men's and women's traditional roles was never encouraged. The lack of an official discourse on gender issues obliged each GDR woman writer to develop her own line of thought in this regard, based on her life experience, as this was the only reliable form of truth against SED propaganda.

This is certainly true of Königsdorf, who fictionalised through her early female figures many aspects of her personal life in order to produce constructive criticism on the real conditions of women in the GDR. This is revealed by her contribution to Maxie Wander's volume of interviews *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*⁷ in which she talks about herself, her family and her education. This strict link between the author's personal experience and her fiction is therefore shown by the fact that many of her heroines are like her in their forties/fifties, have grown-up children and a successful career. Yet, despite their apparent success, they feel profoundly unfulfilled, in search of an identity after years spent neglecting themselves as persons, trying to conform to society's expectations while repressing their own individuality. This is also the experience recounted by Königsdorf in her interview with Wander in which she confesses that, despite having a loving family and a fulfilling job, she cannot get rid of the feeling 'etwas Wichtiges versäumt zu haben'.⁸

The attempt to get in touch with themselves and their feelings is therefore the central theme of the women-centred stories which I will analyse in this chapter.⁹ In *Meine ungehörigen Träume* women are helped

⁷ Königsdorf's contribution to the book appears under the title 'Alraune oder Das ungelebte Leben'. See Wander, M., *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* [see note 6 of the Introduction], 115-123. Although she used the name Margot W., she revealed her real identity in an article in which she remembered the late Maxie Wander. The title of the article is 'Sie hat uns gefehlt in der Zeit, die wir Wende nannten: Begegnung mit Maxie Wander', *Freitag*, 13.06.1997.

⁸ Ibid., 115.

⁹ The stories selected from MT are: 'Bolero', 7-14, 'Meine ungehörigen Träume', 55-76 and 'Hochzeitstag in Pizunda', 112-132. Those chosen from LD are: 'Das Krokodil im Haussee', 21-40, 'Die Wahrheit über Schorsch', 41-50, 'Pi', 68-87 and 'Unverhoffter Besuch', 180-186, while those extracted from LV are: 'Unterbrechung', 40-61, 'Kirchgang', 136-147 and 'Reise im Winter', 148-160.

by dreams to battle against their dissatisfaction and to liberate themselves from oppressive patterns of thinking and behaviour. Seeing that the opportunities for women to break away were diminishing, in her two later collections, *Der Lauf der Dinge* and *Lichtverhältnisse*, the ironical tone of the first short stories becomes more sombre and pessimistic. As Königsdorf's belief in the possibility of change starts fading, the suspicion emerges, as Lia Secci has remarked, 'daß das Unbehagen, die Misere und der Tod der Menschen durch die Grausamkeit des Systems verursacht sein könnten oder in ihm zumindest keinerlei Rückhalt finden'.¹⁰

Thus, the little progression made by the system in allowing individuals to put a halt to the perpetuation of roles of subordination from generation to generation is one of the main themes running through the stories of *Der Lauf der Dinge*. Through the analysis of different generations of women and their degree of not just financial, but also intellectual and emotional emancipation, Königsdorf enables the reader to assess to what extent society has progressed in liberating women (and men) from restrictive traditional expectations. Finally, the idea that the emancipation of the individual, and of women in particular, had entered a phase of stagnation is conveyed in *Lichtverhältnisse*, where the main theme is that of women's resignation to their inability to communicate and live according to their feelings.

While the short stories are a mixture of fantasy elements, sarcasm and black humour, *Respektloser Umgang*, Königsdorf's first novel, offers a more serious portrayal of two women, a contemporaneous scientist and the late Lise Meitner, the famous physicist who in the 1930s worked with Otto Hahn on the experiments leading to the splitting of the atom.¹¹ Many of the

¹⁰ Secci, L., 'Helga Königsdorf: Eine 'ungehörige' Schriftstellerin', in Chiarloni, A. et al. (eds), *Die Literatur der DDR 1976-1986* (Pisa: Giardini, 1988), 199-206 (here 202).

¹¹ Königsdorf started developing an interest in Lise Meitner in the early 1980s when the DEFA asked her to research the life of the scientist for a film. See Kaufmann, E., 'Haltung nehmen' [see note 30 of the Introduction], 279.

themes introduced in her previous works find their place within the fairly complex structure of this novel, which is based on the monologue of a first-person narrator, a middle-aged scientist faced with an incurable illness and in search of her true identity. The process of self-assessment the narrator undertakes is stimulated by her imaginary dialogue with the well-known physicist, who helps her to analyse both her past and her contemporary situation, including issues such as the nuclear and the ecological threats. Although this work deals with various themes, including the concept of resistance and responsibility, the role of science both in the past and within modern society,¹² it nevertheless represents the best example to illustrate why I choose to define Königsdorf's concept of emancipation as 'Individualhumanismus'. In fact, in *Respektloser Umgang* the discussion of women's issues is part of a much bigger argument, promoting the possibility open to all individuals - and not just women - to determine their own life, while respecting their own needs and desires and those of others.

Although Königsdorf concentrates mainly on problems faced by women in her pre-1989 works, her latest work *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* seems an attempt to resume the discussion of women's issues after a long pause. Especially with the figure of Frau Schrader, she re-introduces the problem of the woman seen as the carer of the family, a role depriving women of their own space. The optimism of *Respektloser Umgang*, in which the protagonist at the end recovers her dignity, is also present in this novel, as Frau Schrader manages to establish both her financial and emotional independence.

However, what seems more important to note is that although after unification Königsdorf temporarily abandoned the discussion of women's issues, she developed another gender-related theme which she had introduced in the epistolary novel *Ungelegener Befund*: homosexuality. In

¹² For the discussion of these themes, see section 2.2.

1992, the exploration of homosexuality found its continuation in Königsdorf's literary production with her first post-unification novel *Gleich neben Afrika*, which tells the love story between two women experiencing the upheavals of 1989-90. The decision to deal with themes, such as lesbianism, which were taboo in the GDR, is in line with the literary trend that Königsdorf had adopted in her previous works by treating literature as a space in which to experiment with alternative life models in order to find the one suiting one's own individuality. Within the framework of Königsdorf's identity as a woman writer, the changes of 1989-90 are therefore important in the way that they lifted the strict rules of censorship limiting the investigation of alternatives which has always been at the core of Königsdorf's interest. It is then not surprising that as early as 1992, with her decision to deal with lesbianism, Königsdorf was already taking advantage of the new horizons now opened to Eastern German writers.

1.2 Personal Experience as the Touchstone

One of the reasons why Königsdorf, while still committed to her career as a mathematician, turned to literature lies, in my view, in a deep sense of dissatisfaction with her own life.¹³ The testimony offered by the documentary literature of the 1970s¹⁴ shows that she shared this feeling with many other women in the GDR. According to the examples provided by Königsdorf's fictional characters, the reason for this was the full commitment to the collective, socialist cause which the GDR demanded of its citizens. This had the consequence that the latter, because of the

¹³ The reason for Königsdorf's decision to dedicate herself to literature as well as the analysis of her relationship to the two disciplines of mathematics and literature are presented in more detail in Chapter 2. See also note 28 of this chapter.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the importance of documentary literature in the 1970s and after 1989, including Königsdorf's works AD and UD, see sections 3.3.3 and 3.4.3. In the context of documentary literature dealing with female emancipation, apart from Maxie Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, there is another work that deserves to be mentioned: Sarah Kirsch's *Die Pantherfrau* [see note 6 of the Introduction]. While at the beginning documentary literature consisted mainly of *Frauenbücher* ('women's books'), later *Männerbücher* ('men's books') as well started being produced, such as Christine Lambrecht's *Männerbekenntnisse: Freimütige Protokolle* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1986) and Christine Müller's *Männerprotokolle* (Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1985).

pressure to conform exercised by the system, often felt that they had no space to develop their individuality.

Particularly in the case of women, expectations were very high: not only were they asked to take active part in the economic development of the state,¹⁵ but also encouraged to form a family.¹⁶ In return, society was offering them an enviable system of maternity leave and nursery care which, although it helped them to combine their job with the duties of motherhood, failed to lead to a fundamental shift in gender roles and family life. The very fact that these measures were intended only for women tells us that women were still seen as having the ultimate responsibility for the well-being of the whole family.¹⁷

This indicates, as has been often remarked, that the GDR remained a profoundly patriarchal society, in which the patriarch was embodied by the 'father state' providing for everything and everybody. The paternalistic welfare politics adopted by the state had the effect of depriving the people of all sense of responsibility by making all the decisions on their behalf. In this manner, not only women, but men too were not given the possibility to emancipate themselves, as they were prevented from determining their own space within society.¹⁸ Paradoxically, this mechanism resulted in instilling

¹⁵ In 1989, 78,1% of GDR women were employed; the percentage reaches 91,2% if one includes women still in education. See Nickel, H. M., 'Mitgestalterinnen des Sozialismus: Frauenarbeit in der DDR', in Nickel, H. M. and Helwig, G., (eds), *Frauen in Deutschland 1945-1992* (Berlin: Akademie, 1993), 233-256 (here 237).

¹⁶ In this respect, it should be pointed out that the integration of women into the economy of the country and their encouragement to become mothers were both measures intended to solve the problem of the GDR's lack of human capital.

¹⁷ A study shows that after a full day at work, once at home women had to start a second shift: in an average East German family in the 1970s, the woman did thirty-seven hours of housework a week, the man five and a half, and the children four. See Sudau, C., 'Women in the GDR', *New German Critique*, No. 13, 1978, 69-81.

¹⁸ This is how Eva Kunz, City Commissioner for Equal Opportunities for the City of East Berlin, commented on emancipation in the GDR: 'From the point of view of the West, women in the GDR were emancipated because most of them had an independent income. But emancipation also means that a woman can determine for herself her place in society, and that did not happen. But it did not happen for men either'. Cited by Dodds, D., 'Women in East Germany: Emancipation or Exploitation?', 113.

a sense of loyalty and gratitude in the people towards the state ultimately seen as the provider.¹⁹

Another problem related to the situation of women in the GDR was that the question of their emancipation was proclaimed as solved on the basis that women were accorded equal rights - enshrined in the constitution - and had the opportunity to work. An ideological discourse never took place and the new problems faced by women as working wives and mothers were declared as left-overs of old societies and destined to disappear with the progression of socialism. Subsequently, while on the one hand women in the GDR gained a feeling of self-worth as a result of being integrated into the economic life of the country, on the other hand the lack of an official critical discussion of their situation left them on their own to cope with the discrepancies of their 'pseudo emancipation'.

Moreover, while in the West one of the things which helped women the most to define their own identity as women was exclusively female gatherings in which they were able to confront their experiences, in the GDR women's movements and groupings were not allowed.²⁰ As late as the 1980s, the first small women's groups began forming. However, they

¹⁹ The feelings of gratitude and loyalty vis-à-vis the GDR as a welfare state are discussed by Königsdorf in 'Was nun?', published in DC, 12-18. This text is analysed in section 3.2.2.2.

²⁰ The only existing movement was the *DFD (Demokratischer Frauenverbund Deutschlands)*, but it did not have independent policies. In this context, it is perhaps important to point out that some women found the support that in the West women would normally find in their groupings at work. This is for example the case of one of the women, Katharina Stillisch, whom Dinah Dodds interviewed for her study entitled *The Wall in my Backyard: East German Women in Transition*: 'I miss my colleagues who I worked with for 16 years because we helped each other. They participated in my divorce. What women in the West called self-help groups we had at work. That was one of the reasons women liked to work so much', in Dodds, D., 'Women in East Germany: Emancipation or Exploitation?', 108.

were closely watched by the state security which was present at all their meetings, and regarded with suspicion by the wider female public who had a negative idea of feminism and were convinced of their emancipation simply because they had equal rights.²¹

This general lack of critical reflection on women's issues in the GDR's public discourse presented a challenge to creative writers. As Eva Kaufmann²² has pointed out, women's writing had a double surrogate function: on the one hand, literature articulated taboos such as the patriarchal structure of the family and the state, which affected the whole of society. On the other hand, it critically highlighted the situation of women under the socialist regime. Without the contribution of women writers such as Helga Königsdorf, Maxie Wander, Christa Wolf, Irmtraud Morgner or Brigitte Reimann²³ in the 1970s and 1980s it would be very difficult for us today to picture the real conditions under which women lived in the GDR. Most important of all, they laid the basis for the development of a female culture whose ultimate function was to offer women in the GDR a yardstick with which to assess their individual progress towards emancipation.

In the absence of an ideological discourse on emancipation, women's literature in the GDR could not but be based on the authors' personal experiences, which had the advantage of making their writings easily accessible to a broader readership. Königsdorf, for example, often uses elements in her women-centred stories based on her own life. This is confirmed by her contribution to *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, in which she

²¹ In the context of women's negative idea of feminism, it seems relevant to mention the experience of Annette Gröschner, one of the founding members of *Lila Offensive*. She was shouted down at a big demonstration just before the Wall opened: 'We already have equal rights', women yelled at her. Ibid., 112.

²² Kaufmann, E., 'DDR-Schriftstellerinnen, die Widersprüche und die Utopie', in Clausen, J. and Friedrichsmeyer, S. (eds), *Women in German Yearbook 7: Feminist Studies of German Literature and Culture* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 109-121 (here 110).

²³ See notes 2 and 6 of the Introduction for a listing of all the most important works published in the 1970s. Examples of works which continued to develop feminist lines of thought in the 1980s are Irmtraud Morgner's *Amanda: Ein Hexenroman* (1983) and Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* (1983).

does not hide her dissatisfaction at having led a life according to a plan, resulting in having to repress all the emotions which could have made her deviate from her self-imposed goals. The pressure to achieve and the weight of her career expectations made her develop a performance complex, which left her with the feeling that beyond her professional life she had no identity: 'Wenn man sich lange auf Leistung trimmt, zerstört man etwas Wichtiges in seiner Persönlichkeit'.²⁴ It is, in fact, only once she reaches the age of 40 that Königsdorf comes to terms with her dissatisfaction and finds the courage to leave the old path to try something completely new. It is at this point that her first stories, as she herself puts it, 'brachen [...] völlig ungerufen aus [ihr] heraus' (MT, 133). (In her interview she actually states that she wanted to do some painting).²⁵

Her testimony in *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* is important as an indisputable piece of evidence of the influence that her life experience had on her pre-1989 work. The social maturity of a woman of forty, who had first-hand experience of combining career and family within the GDR framework and who had developed in the course of the years a critical attitude towards the system, as her interview reveals, is what makes her work so precise and authentic.

Her participation in the making of Wander's book seems also to have helped Königsdorf to establish the underlying criteria for her work. Thus, very much like Wander, whose work is based on the principle that 'jedes Leben [ist] hinreichend interessant, um anderen mitgeteilt zu werden',²⁶ Königsdorf too places a lot of importance on the individual per se, as is shown by the fact that she often portrays ordinary women, leading a very

²⁴ Wander, M., *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, 116.

²⁵ Curiously enough, this could have been what Königsdorf really had in mind at the time of the interview given that since September 1998, after 20 years of writing activity, she has started doing some painting. See Königsdorf's interview 'Ich bin nicht reduzierbar auf die Krankheit: Helga Königsdorf über Parkinson als Preis für den aufrechten Gang, chemische Peitschen und den Zufall, daß man ausgewählt wurde zu leben', *Neues Deutschland*, 27./28.02.1999.

²⁶ Wander, M., *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, 8.

normal, at times even tedious life, who are neither particularly talented nor have achieved anything special. At the same time, both Wander's interviews and Königsdorf's stories recount authentic experiences with which the majority of readers can identify, what Christa Wolf in 'Berührung', the text introducing the Western edition of *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, defines as '[d]er unwiederholbare Einzelfall mit hohem Verallgemeinerungswert'.²⁷ In addition, in their search for the individual's identity, both Wander and Königsdorf try to answer the very simple questions, ignored by the official policies, of who the GDR's women in reality are and what they really want. By making women and their lives with all their frustrations and contradictions transparent, they manage to turn the private into the public, thus helping women to achieve self-awareness.

1.3 *Meine ungehörigen Träume*: the Search for Identity and the Power of Dreams

1.3.1 The Search for Identity

The feelings of dissatisfaction which Königsdorf articulated as a first person statement in *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* were shortly afterwards transformed into the central theme of many of the short stories she wrote in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. What Königsdorf defines as *Einengung*, that is the feeling of being hemmed in, is very often the psychological state of her female characters at the onset of the stories. While in her case such a feeling was largely the consequence of a long career in the field of mathematics,²⁸ in her stories it is often the result of

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁸ In an interview she states: '[...] die Wahrnehmung einer sehr starken Einengung der Persönlichkeit [wurde] tatsächlich zu einem Schreibantrieb für mich'. See 'Schreib-Auskunft: Helga Königsdorf', interview with Köbernick, K., *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1979, 9-12 (here 10). In another interview, she explains that after having worked many years as a mathematician, she became aware that she was 'nie auf diesem Gebiet als ganze Persönlichkeit gefordert' and that was the reason why she found herself striving for 'eine Befreiung vom streng Rationalen'. See 'Diskussion nach der Lesung von Helga Königsdorf', in Chiarloni, A. et al. (eds), *Die Literatur der DDR 1976-1986* [see note 10 above], 449-455 (here 453). This theme is further discussed in Chapter 2.

unfulfilling relationships, from which women seek to liberate themselves in order to look for alternative routes to the traditional patterns. Hence, the stories are built first on the women's attempt to come to terms with the causes of their dissatisfaction, and then on their struggle to break out of their oppressive situation and eventually find new possibilities for self-fulfilment, which is the phase requiring most courage. As Eva Kaufmann has pointed out: 'Das Schwergewicht liegt in diesem Buch [MT] nicht auf der Auseinandersetzung mit dem, was ist, sondern auf der geistig-psychischen Anstrengung, über es hinauszukommen'.²⁹

This is certainly true of the main character in 'Bolero' who is involved in an unsatisfactory relationship, for her partner fulfils neither her emotional nor her sexual needs. Despite the fact that she is presented as an independent woman, she seems unable to liberate herself from her meaningless relationship. On the contrary, she denies herself and lets herself be manipulated by her selfish lover, who is the one determining the affair. When he feels like seeing her, he goes to her flat, where she waits for him in a nice dress and with dinner ready to be served. She even fakes sexual pleasure for his sake and takes the contraceptive pill against her will to prevent him from worrying (MT, 10).

Similarly to this figure who has accepted self-subordination to her lover, the protagonist of 'Hochzeitstag in Pizunda' also has the feeling of having lost her identity. However, she is at a stage further than the female character in 'Bolero': even though she is no longer in touch with who she is, she has already acknowledged her real situation and is trying to gather the courage to rebel against it with the help of writing. The story consists in fact of fifteen diary entries written during a family holiday on the Black Sea in which she tries to reconstruct her personality. At the end of her

²⁹ Kaufmann, E., 'Helga Königsdorfs Band "Meine ungehörigen Träume"' [see note 30 of the Introduction], 109-113 (here 112).

emotional journey, she reaches the decision to end a marriage which has lasted twenty years and from which two children were born, and start a new life with another man.

The reason why she starts writing a diary in order to get back in touch with her emotional self and her feelings is that she discovers that 'Schreiben ist maximale Kommunikation' (MT, 119). As she finds herself isolated by society, which does not accept her behaviour since it endangers her marriage, the diary becomes her main confidant. Apart from allowing her to be honest with herself and to acknowledge her most intimate feelings, it also has the advantage that it provides her with the distance she needs from society's conditioning and from the education she received based on conforming and adapting to pre-established patterns of behaviour. Through writing, she can let her repressed subjectivity finally triumph and, in this way, find her identity:

Ich schreibe jetzt, weil ich schreiben muß. Das ist nicht einfach die Folge einer unbefriedigenden Ehe. Ich habe hastig gelebt. Ich habe Verhaltensmuster akzeptiert, die mir aufgeschwatzt worden sind. Ich habe Talent bewiesen, alles zu tun, was man von mir erwartete. Nur eines habe ich darüber vergessen. Ich weiß nicht mehr, wer ich bin.
Ich wage jetzt das große Abenteuer. Ich begeben mich auf die Suche nach mir selbst. (MT, 118)

One of the main causes for her loss of identity is her marriage, which she sees as an institution having a solid form - an awareness she ironically gains after experiencing how well a woman's interests are protected in case of divorce -, but, at least in her case, not much content. She finds herself reflecting on whether every marriage is destined to be short-lived, as the only happy phase is the first one, when the two partners are erroneously convinced that they are able to change both themselves and the other person. In her view, this illusory period is followed by a time of anger and irritation, which ends in resignation and indifference towards the partner (MT, 115).

Ultimately, she believes that many couples remain together because they are paralysed by the fear of being on their own. The ironical aspect of this is that while the fear of being alone might be the reason why many marriages survive, in many cases a meaningless and routine relationship can be the primary cause of loneliness. This is well illustrated by the experience of the female figure in 'Bolero'. Since her lover does not even try to offer her support and understanding, for instance he gives her a false telephone number, she works over-hard in order to repress her need for happiness instead of looking for it elsewhere (MT, 12). Even a caring and understanding partner cannot prevent loneliness from entering a relationship if one of the two people has lost his/her identity, as in the case of the protagonist of 'Hochzeitstag in Pizunda', who realises that: 'Ich war einsam, weil ich meine Identität verloren hatte' (MT, 118). However, she is able to react to her loneliness and her fear of it in a natural way, by accepting the risk involved in any change, on the principle that 'es wäre Phantasielosigkeit, keine Angst zu haben' (MT, 116).

Nonetheless, if marriage can be one of the reasons leading to a loss of identity, as illustrated in 'Hochzeitstag in Pizunda', this is mainly due to its social aspect. As she is the spectator of a wedding in Pizunda, she reaches the conclusion that the wedding day marks the point in time when one is no longer considered as an individual, but perceived only as part of a larger entity: 'Hochzeit. Tag, an dem du dich offiziell als eigenständige Persönlichkeit aufgibst, denn von nun an heißt es nicht mehr "du", sondern "ihr"' (MT, 124).

This loss of individuality is accompanied by the pressure imposed by society to stay together. Breaking out of wedlock is in fact the equivalent to breaking a traditional pattern, and therefore it implies falling out of the social norm. In this regard, because of society's rigidity towards any deviation from established models of behaviour, the protagonist concludes

that it seems almost as if it would be preferable to have a society formed by unhappy and emotionally repressed people:

Weshalb gibt es noch das Etikett: führt ein geordnetes Familienleben, gleichgültig, wie es in diesen geordneten Verhältnissen aussieht. Glauben wir denn, wir müßten die Gesellschaft mit Verkrüppelten aufbauen? (MT, 117)

Apart from the end of one's love for the other person, there are other reasons which, according to the protagonist, contribute to making married life very difficult within modern society. She is convinced that in the past it was easier to manage a marriage because the roles for husband and wife were well defined. As a modern woman, she is not ready to accept a subordinate role; she needs time for herself, in order to develop herself as a person. Even though her husband shows himself willing to support her, he continues to hope secretly that she will eventually adopt a traditional female role, thus failing to share responsibilities with her (MT, 127).

However, the pressure to deny herself for the sake of her family is not the only kind experienced by a woman. The protagonist is of the opinion that her inability to recognise her own emotions and desires is a consequence of the fact that in order to be able to achieve professional success, the price she had to pay was to sacrifice her interests and repress her emotional side. This causes individuals to retire to their own 'Schneckenhaus' (MT, 119), which is also a way to hide the fact that they have lost their ability to communicate.

The themes of the difficulty for women to combine career and family, be successful in both, and still achieve self-realisation are amongst those with a pronounced feminist flavour. Others are the brief discussion of abortion³⁰ and the introduction of the contraceptive pill as two measures

³⁰ The issue of abortion also features in a later short story, 'Unterbrechung', part of LV and discussed in section 1.5. Furthermore, it is mentioned in 'Liriodendron Tulipifera', part of LD, in which the protagonist had an abortion when she was still a student, and this was the reason why later she could not have children. Finally in SR, Königsdorf cites abortion again as one of the

which give the woman full control over her body. In this regard, Königsdorf ironically remarks that if on the one hand abortion and contraception have freed men from any kind of worry, on the other hand, they have excluded them from the decision-making process on whether to have a child, which is now entirely in the hands of the woman:

Die Pille und das Recht, eine Schwangerschaft zu unterbrechen, haben den Mann endgültig von der Verpflichtung befreit, sich über die Sache irgendwelche Gedanken zu machen. Unrecht wird ihm nur getan, wenn die Frau ihn reinlegt und er unverhofft zur Kasse gebeten wird. (MT, 126)

The other feminist issue briefly mentioned here is another aspect of society's pressure on women to keep up a marriage, namely the social difficulties they face in reconstructing a life for themselves after a divorce. As women are supposed to retire earlier than men, for a middle-aged woman it is almost impossible to reintegrate herself into any working environment. These are the reflections made by the main character in 'Hochzeitstag in Pizunda', when she is thinking of her lover's wife who is much older than she is and therefore has fewer possibilities to begin anew.³¹ In a later story 'Die Wahrheit über Schorsch', Königsdorf also underlines how important it is for the social status of a middle-aged woman not to be on her own. After three disappointing relationships, the female protagonist of this story resorts to the fictional lover of her youth, as it is the only way for her to be seen as successful: 'Ich brauchte wirklich keinen Mann. Es ist nur wegen der Leute. Eine Frau in meinem Alter, die keinen Mann vorzeigen kann, wird als wandelnder Mißerfolg eingestuft' (LD, 50).

sources of conflict between East and West after unification (SR, 137). The widespread acceptance of abortion in the GDR is also underlined by the fact that the decision of Alice to give away her child is seen as immoral, while abortion would have been regarded as a normal procedure (SR, 135).

³¹ 'Aber sie ist älter als ich. Um wesentliche Jahre älter. Wie soll sie neu anfangen in unserer Gesellschaft, in der die Frauen immer noch viel schneller altern als Männer, obwohl es den biologischen Tatsachen widerspricht. Das Vorurteil reicht von den Kaderleitungen bis zu den zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen. Es gibt Bereiche, in denen wir Frauen zwangsweise jünger aus dem Arbeitsprozeß entlassen werden als die Männer. Niemand befragt uns, ob wir das tatsächlich als Vorrecht empfinden. Uns Frauen, die wir entscheidende Jahre unserer Entwicklung für die Reproduktion der Gesellschaft drangeben, wird nicht einmal das Nachholen gestattet'. (MT, 130).

Even if 'Bolero' ends with the main character throwing her lover off the balcony of her flat, both this story and 'Hochzeitstag in Pizunda' are positive overall, as they end with their protagonists being able to react to their dissatisfaction, thus getting rid of any social constraints and recovering their identity. Particularly in 'Hochzeitstag in Pizunda', Königsdorf makes it clear that despite being disappointed by previous relationships, her female figures do not give up their idea of love and hope to be able to turn their romantic ideals into reality. This faith in love is strengthened by Königsdorf herself who dedicates her stories to 'Meiner Liebe, die mir täglich stirbt und die ich immer neu erschaffe'.

1.3.2 The Meaning of Dreams

Dreams are the way in which Königsdorf's female characters manage to win back self-determination and develop a sense of self-realisation. As the title anticipates, Königsdorf's dreams are 'ungehörig', in the sense that they challenge conventional ways of thinking and behaving in order to open a window on alternatives to traditional and conformist lifestyles. By allowing women 'gegen "Barrieren" des Denkens, gegen Klischees im Fühlen und Verhalten, gegen überlebte Normen anzurennen',³² dreams give them the courage to break free and start a life in which they can express their individuality. Accordingly, dreams are also 'Heiler und Tröster'.³³ It is then clear that Königsdorf does not adopt dreams to flee the harshness of reality, but because through them she can

mit den Dingen spielen, verblüffende Vorgänge, verblüffende Schlüsse benutzen, die eine Situation in grelles Licht tauchen und damit ein Problem erhellen, wie es durch einfache Beschreibungen realer Vorgänge vielleicht nicht immer gelingt.³⁴

³² Kaufmann, E., 'Helga Königsdorfs Band "Meine ungehörigen Träume"', 112.

³³ Grunenberg, A., 'Träumen und Fliegen: Neue Identitätsbilder in der Frauenliteratur der DDR', in Klusmann, P. G. and Mohr, H. (eds), *Probleme deutscher Identität, Jahrbuch zur Literatur in der DDR 3* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1983), 157-167 (here 163).

³⁴ Interview with Köbernick [see note 28 above], 12.

Perhaps the best example³⁵ of the double function of dreams as ‘aktive Bewältigung von Problemen’³⁶ and as provider of consolation and courage to develop one’s potential is the title-story ‘Meine ungehörigen Träume’. Here, the five dreams of the female protagonist help her to overcome her problematic relationship to men and male authority, symbolised by an ever-present ‘Direktor’, while gaining self-confidence, and attaining a sense of self-fulfilment. In each dream, she finds herself having to deal with her ex-lovers with whom she has different experiences, including physical violence, which all contribute to her reaching self-awareness. In her final dream, as she discovers that her lover was only after her money, it is clear that she has finally gained self-confidence because she is able to react to him. In fact, she develops superhuman strength, which she uses to smash bottles on his skull (MT, 76).

Another story in which Königsdorf introduces dreams as a ‘angriffslustige Auseinandersetzung mit der Wirklichkeit’³⁷ is ‘Bolero’. Even if a first reading of it might not reveal the presence of a dream, the character’s impulsive decision to throw her lover off the balcony can be regarded as one of her fantasies. As Eva Kaufmann has observed, the distant ironical tone with which the protagonist in ‘Bolero’ tells her story makes it impossible to distinguish dream from reality, and therefore to establish whether she has actually committed the act, or is only wishing to do so.³⁸ Margy Gerber too interpreted the final deed as a ‘liberating dream’,³⁹ for it opens her the way to self-assertion.

³⁵ Another story part of this collection which deals with the importance of dreams is ‘Die Nacht beginnt am Tag’, 94-103. This is discussed in section 3.3.2.

³⁶ Interview with Köbernich, 11.

³⁷ Kaufmann, E., ‘Helga Königsdorfs Band “Meine ungehörigen Träume”’, 109.

³⁸ ‘Es gibt in dem, was erzählt wird, keinen Punkt, der einen deutlich spürbaren Übergang von der Wiedergabe von Handlungen zur Wiedergabe von Traumbildern markiert’, *ibid.*, 110.

³⁹ See Gerber, M., ‘Impertinence, Productive Fear and Hope: The Writings of Helga Königsdorf’ [see note 27 of the Introduction], 184.

Even though I have already mentioned writing as one of the main elements helping the protagonist of 'Hochzeitstag in Pizunda' to find herself, dreaming also plays a large role in giving her the courage to break free. Through her dreams she has visions of how her holiday in Pizunda would be, had she been there with her new partner. Since the images she creates in her dreams are by no means a reflection of an untroubled, harmonious existence, they confront her with the problems she could be facing in her new relationship. In short, dreams turn into trial runs for possible future reality. In this manner, it becomes easier for her to imagine 'the unimaginable', which in her case is to break out of a marriage of twenty years. Furthermore, as her dreams are not idyllic portraits of a new romantic life, but images of daily reality, they do not trick her into making a decision based on utopian visions. In this light, dreams become means to understand reality better, not to flee from it.

Königsdorf's adoption of dreams in her works makes her part of that literary current which was a celebration of the world of fantasy and at the same time a protest against the assumption that the only reality is the one perceived with the intellect. Perhaps the author who best represents this movement, which was very specific to the GDR's cultural landscape in the 1970s and 1980s, is Irmtraud Morgner. Works such as *Hochzeit in Konstantinopel*, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz* and *Amanda*,⁴⁰ in which Morgner experiments with myths and fairy tales in the attempt to find fantastic alternatives to the dullness of daily life, were surely a great source of inspiration to Königsdorf. This is made evident by the homage she pays to Morgner in the opening section of 'Meine ungehörigen Träume', in which the protagonist's dreams are stimulated by her stories (MT, 55).

⁴⁰ See Morgner, I., *Hochzeit in Konstantinopel: Roman* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1970), first published in 1968, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura: Roman in dreizehn Büchern und sieben Intermezzos* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1980), first published in 1974 and *Amanda: Ein Hexenroman* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1983), first published in 1983.

1.4 *Der Lauf der Dinge*: Königsdorf's Mothers and Daughters

The women-centred stories of *Meine ungehörigen Träume* contain an easily detectable element of hope and optimism. Through the characters of the above mentioned short stories, Königsdorf shows her female readers that it is possible for them to break free, reject traditional patterns and determine their own existence. However, this kind of scenario, opening with ordinary women feeling limited and ending with their self-liberation, changes considerably in the following collections of short stories, *Der Lauf der Dinge* and *Lichtverhältnisse*, in which the female figures, instead of finding the courage to rebel, end up resigning. The 'ungehörigen Träume' ('impertinent dreams') stop assuming a liberating function, and in *Der Lauf der Dinge* are turned into 'zentnerschweren Träume' ('very heavy dreams'),⁴¹ which give the impression of being nightmares rather than dreams.

Despite the more pessimistic tone characterising these works, it would nevertheless be wrong to assume that they do not have anything in common with the first collection of stories. As Heinz Czechowski has noticed: 'die Lektüre ihrer beiden Bücher [...] ergibt *ein Bild*'.⁴² This is true as, for example in *Der Lauf der Dinge*, Königsdorf presents how women of her generation were socialised. Thus, by discussing the background of the same type of women who in *Meine ungehörigen Träume* were portrayed in their daily life, Königsdorf helps her readership to appreciate better the psychological efforts they had to make to break away from conventionalities. Moreover, the advantage of focusing on her generation gives Königsdorf - who was born in 1938 - the possibility of analysing the role of her contemporaries both as daughters and mothers. In

⁴¹ This is the title of a short story, 111-120, in which, as the title anticipates, dreams do not represent a liberating experience. On the contrary, in one of her dreams for example, the narrator denies herself in order to find acceptance among her peers (LD, 112). Overall, the dreams create an atmosphere of fear and powerlessness.

⁴² Czechowski, H., 'Laudatio: Heinrich Mann-Preis 1985', *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, Vol. 33, No. 7, 1985, 156-162 (158).

this fashion, she can assess the development of the emancipation of women since the founding of the GDR and indirectly challenge its claim to be based on equality between men and women.

The theme of the importance of the mother in the formation of the daughter's gendered identity is illustrated in particular in the story 'Die Wahrheit über Schorsch'. Here the way in which the mother introduces the topic of female and male interaction to her young girl going through puberty, makes her incapable for the rest of her life of building meaningful relationships. The warnings launched by the mother about 'die unglaubliche Verlogenheit der Männer, die alle lediglich dieses eine wollten, was einer Frau eigentlich gar keinen Spaß mache' (LD, 42), and about men's loss of respect for those girls who give in to these pressures, stop her from maintaining the necessary spontaneity to develop a healthy relationship with her own sexuality and the other sex.⁴³ As the mother's teachings instil in her many fears which wash away the little self-confidence she has, she resorts to inventing a boyfriend named Schorsch in order to protect herself from losing her reputation and from the other terrible things which, according to the mother, are looming on the horizon. The extent of the negative influence of how she was introduced to interpersonal relationships is such that after three failed marriages she goes back to the fictional Schorsch.

The sad aspect of this story illustrating the difficulty of breaking through traditional patterns is the fact that the mother, despite having been herself a victim of a male-orientated society, in which a woman is forced to follow certain rules in order to be treated with respect, does nothing in her later life to promote gender equality. On the contrary, she ends up

⁴³ This reflects very much Königsdorf's experience, who, in her entry for *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, states: 'Meine Mutter hat mir andere Komplexe eingeedet: Nimm dich vor den Männern in acht, sie wollen alle was von dir, anschließend lachen sie dich aus', 119.

perpetuating the prejudices and stereotypes which made her suffer by forcing her daughter to abide by them. The latter is aware of this, as she observes: '[die Mutter] warf mir ein engmaschiges Netz von Verhaltensregeln über, unter denen schon Mütter und Großmütter gelitten hatten' (LD, 42).

In the story 'Das Krokodil im Haussee', Königsdorf continues to explore the theme of mothers' reaction to the role of subordination they had to accept, but from a completely different angle. Here, she shows how a mother condemned to undertake the traditional task of the carer for the whole family transforms her role into a form of tyranny. She copes with her bitterness at not having had the opportunity to determine her own life by imposing her will on her children and husband. She does so by making them feel guilty for the self-sacrificing existence she leads and by making them completely dependent on her:

Mama die Seele unserer Familie zu nennen, würde die Lage nicht vollkommen charakterisieren. Mama war das Hirn, die Galle, die rechte Hand und was sonst noch alles lebenswichtig ist [...]. Sie wußte, was einem jeden von uns guttat. Ihre Fürsorge und Liebe waren grenzenlos [...]. Keiner von uns konnte sich vorstellen, ohne Mama diesem Leben gewachsen zu sein. (LD, 24)

Both the perpetuation of subordinated roles and the tyrannical attitude assumed by certain mothers feature in *Respektloser Umgang*. The protagonist's mother, who after being forced to decide between marriage and career also turns her self-sacrificing attitude into tyranny, tries to impose on the daughter traditional female roles. In her specific case, she fails because the daughter's education was taken over by the father who, since he wanted a son, teaches her to behave and think like a man. However, Königsdorf seems to suggest that the mother had in any case very little chance of succeeding given that the daughter's generation, which is also Königsdorf's generation, had rejected their parental figures as role models. In general, the shadow of the Second World War hanging over the previous generation automatically disqualified them as potential sources of

inspiration. With regard to women, mothers too stopped being an example for their daughters, as the latter were determined to move away from the traditional female roles of housewife and child-bearer.

The women of Königsdorf's generation have therefore neither history (RU, 20) nor role models to follow, as they live in a newly founded country which is calling on them primarily to contribute to its economic development. Hence, some of Königsdorf's stories are portrayals of the efforts which GDR women, especially those born in the 1930s and 1940s, had to make in order to undo the traditional education they received, and fight against stereotypes and traditional commonplaces asserting men's superiority over women.⁴⁴ The enthusiasm of the GDR's first years of existence rushed this generation of women into their new role of working mothers, and left them with the pressure to cope with what is now a double sphere of responsibilities.⁴⁵ Without much time to undergo an analysis of their past and present situation and with a heavy burden of expectations to fulfil, Königsdorf's generation went through life not according to their individual needs, but following the tasks which society had ascribed to them. The impression that they have not developed their own potential emerges especially when they reach middle age. It is at this stage that they normally realise they have lost their identity.

The protagonist of 'Unverhoffter Besuch' for instance is a woman of this kind. By introducing the unexpected visit of a young daughter, Britt, to her mother, Königsdorf can draw a comparison between the generations of the two women. The first difference which emerges is that while the

⁴⁴ The young female figure of 'Wenn ich groß bin, werde ich Bergsteiger' who grew up during the war years is convinced that 'Vater ist viel klüger als Mutter' and then extends the newly discovered truth to the rest of society: 'Männer sind viel klüger als Frauen' (LD, 93).

⁴⁵ As I pointed out in the previous section, the family remained the responsibility of women. Even if a series of measures were introduced to help women to combine family and career, I also illustrated how the GDR remained a patriarchal society, and that because of this women suffered what is normally referred to as *Mehrfachbelastung*, that is the burden of having to carry out multiple tasks as mothers, working women and housewives.

mother, who had to fight off the typical female insecurities of her generation,⁴⁶ is still looking for an inner balance - her goal is 'in [sich] selbst heimisch zu werden' (LD, 185) -, the daughter comes across as being more self-confident. For example, she is unwilling to give up her individuality, and complains to the mother that the school's orientation programmes make her feel as if she were not ultimately the only one responsible for her life.⁴⁷ While the mother's generation grew up with the feeling that they had to be grateful to the state for the opportunities it granted them,⁴⁸ and for this reason did not dare to diverge from society's expectations, Britt has the courage to want something for herself: 'Britt ist nicht undankbar. Aber sie will auch nicht dauernd dankbar sein. Sie möchte etwas ganz Eigenes' (LD, 185).

Since the strong performance pressure, which burdened the mother's youth, does not condition to the same extent Britt's vision of the future, she can develop herself freely, without following any precise plan. By contrast, like many women of her generation, in the pursuit of her goals, Britt's mother lost track of her personal development and successfully followed her career plan to the last phase without finding self-fulfilment. Furthermore, the pressure this generation of women had to achieve their goals was intensified by the fact that they saw their achievements as a way to prove their self-worth, and that they really deserved to be recognised as equal to men. Britt's mother realises that her daughter does not feel the same need to assert her emancipation, and that she also has fewer illusions on how women are considered in the working environment:

Sie würde gern Staatsanwalt wie ihr Vater. Aber dafür nehmen sie keine Mädchen. Britt sieht das ein. Sie sieht auch ein, daß sie bei fast allen Bewerbungen bessere Leistungen vorweisen muß als ein Junge. Frauen sind unökonomisch, sagt Britt. (LD, 185)

⁴⁶ 'Offensichtlich leidet sie nicht an jenem Unterlegenheitsgefühl Männern gegenüber, das mir bereits mit der Muttermilch eingeflößt wurde' (LD, 186).

⁴⁷ 'Wir werden ständig orientiert, sagt Britt. Vor lauter Orientierung hast du schließlich den Eindruck, alle anderen sind dafür verantwortlich, was aus dir wird, nur du selbst nicht' (LD, 185).

⁴⁸ See note 19 above.

The fact that the hope and the enthusiasm which had characterised Königsdorf's youth have been replaced with the disillusionment and the indifference towards society of the younger generation is also highlighted in 'Pi', the monologue of a sixteen-year-old about his life. As one of the many children who suffered from his parents' divorce,⁴⁹ he does not believe in marriage (LD, 82). Going to school is for him a source of frustration because he is given the impression that he is entitled to an opinion, but in fact he is only asked to repeat parrot-fashion established, unoriginal formulas on how one should behave and think. He also believes that society's goals play no role in his personal life. His aspirations for the future lack the 'gehörige gesellschaftliche Komponenten' (LD, 82) and, in contrast to his successful mother who 'scheint zu glauben, man kann nur mit unerreichbaren Zielen glücklich sein' (LD, 83), his ideals are very modest. In the hope that nature would have not been completely destroyed by the time he is an adult, he simply wants to live in a green area, in a little house with a garage, animals, plants and time to go fishing on Sundays (LD, 82).

The generation gap, as portrayed by Königsdorf, is also reflected in the attitude shown by Eastern German women to the changes introduced by unification. According to a study carried out by Chris Weedon,⁵⁰ young women felt that after the 'peaceful Revolution' their chances of developing their individuality had increased. The women of the older generation, for whom the dismantling of the socialist organisation and system of values represented in many cases a real trauma, appeared to be more disorientated and assailed by feelings of what has been called *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the former GDR). Paradoxically, older women had developed a love-hate

⁴⁹ In 1989, with 40% of marriages breaking down, the GDR had the highest divorce rate in the world. More than a half broke down within three years and in the majority of cases, women initiated divorce proceedings. See Kolinsky, E., *Women in Contemporary Germany: Life, Work and Politics* (Oxford; Providence: Berg, 1993), 261.

⁵⁰ See Weedon, C., 'Changing Subjectivities? Women and Identity', in Boa, E. and Wharton, J. (eds), *Women and the Wende* [see note 22 of the Introduction], 115-123.

relationship with the idea of living according to a plan matching society's expectations. Once it had disappeared, they felt completely at a loss.

1.5 *Lichtverhältnisse*: the Feeling of Resignation

If *Der Lauf der Dinge* displays first signs of pessimism, the next collection *Lichtverhältnisse* leaves no doubt about Königsdorf's declining faith in society's ability to create spaces for the development and the exercise of one's own individuality. The extent of Königsdorf's loss of hope is illustrated by the female figures introduced with stories such as 'Unterbrechung' and 'Kirchgang' who 'ordnen sich Zwängen der Objektivierung und Selbstzerstörung von Individuen unter, die ihnen in ihrer ganz auf Leistung abgestellten Gesellschaft bereits "natürlich" vorkommen'.⁵¹ While in the previous stories Königsdorf endowed her fictional figures with the potential to change their lives, in *Lichtverhältnisse* the characters have grown to accept the 'necessity' of repressing their feelings and emotions without even questioning why it had to be that way. In short, the only feeling they are left with is resignation to the fact that 'die Lebenssituation der Menschen [erscheint] hermetisch abgeriegelt gegen andere Möglichkeiten des Daseins'.⁵²

The most exemplary character in this context is the protagonist of 'Unterbrechung', Roswitha, a forty-two year old divorcee who discovers she is pregnant. Like most of Königsdorf's figures, she is an apparently successful woman, who has managed to combine motherhood and career, but who has not been able to construct fulfilling relationships either with her children or with her partner. The inability to relate to the people closest to her seems the inevitable result of Roswitha's distance from herself, which Königsdorf has emphasised by choosing to write the story in the third person.

⁵¹ Schmidt, C., *Rückzüge und Aufbrüche: Zur DDR-Literatur in der Gorbatschow-Ära* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1995), 97.

⁵² Ibid.

Roswitha's children come across as completely uninterested in their mother - they do not even ask her why she has to go to the hospital when she has the abortion - and relate to her only when they have material requests. Königsdorf suggests that such an emotional handicap could be the consequence of the fact that Roswitha's mother was unable to communicate her love to her, and therefore she could not give her children what she never had herself. This uneasiness between members of the same family is also described in *Respektloser Umgang*, where the protagonist's mother finds it difficult to hold her child. As a result, the protagonist does not know how to be tender with her own daughter, who in turn is embarrassed when the mother tries to be affectionate. From generation to generation, Königsdorf's characters end up suffering from the same deficits without being able to break the vicious circle of negative behaviour: 'Erfahrenes wird weitergegeben. Es ist schwer, den Strom zu durchbrechen' (RU, 85).

Roswitha's relationship to Gottlieb, her present partner, is also cold and sterile. She clearly admits not loving him, but being with him simply because after her divorce he was the man who 'ging ihr weniger auf die Nerven als jeder andere Mann, den sie kannte' (LV, 45). The lack of sincere love and the inability to communicate on an emotional level is highlighted by the pregnancy, for the issue is resolved by Roswitha reassuring Gottlieb that she has already made an appointment for the abortion. Any other possibility is not discussed, but excluded by Gottlieb's 'reasonable' arguments based on Roswitha's advanced age and state of health and on the fact that between the two of them they already have five children from their previous relationships. After these brief superficial considerations in which feelings play no role, everything goes back to normal, without even a trace of 'gemeinsame Traurigkeit über den Verzicht' (LV, 54).

Roswitha proceeds with the abortion regardless of the fact that her first reaction to the unexpected pregnancy was one of joy. She is too little in touch with her feelings to fight against the pressure surrounding her. Everybody - from Gottlieb to Roswitha's mother, from her best friend Karla to her boss - takes for granted that abortion is the only possibility, without even considering that Roswitha might feel differently about it. As she is used to fulfilling other peoples' expectations, she forces herself to adopt 'eine Art Über-Ich' (LV, 45) in order to control her emotions and cope with the crisis which is engulfing her. She even persuades herself that she had no hesitation about having an abortion and that she is in reality the one who wants to go ahead with it. In short, she adapts to society's expectations, thus failing even to acknowledge her desires.

While 'alles verlief ganz logisch. Zwangsläufig. Fast ohne ihren Willen' (LV, 49), the only person who seems to see an alternative to abortion is the doctor. Unfortunately, Roswitha is unable to grasp the chance the doctor is offering her to discuss the real possibility of keeping the baby. On the contrary, as she is desperately trying to convince herself of the irrevocability of her decision, she is disappointed that the doctor does not instead mention the potential dangers of having a child at her age – she is over forty.

Ultimately, the 'Unterbrechung', which refers to the abortion, but also to the interruption of Roswitha's routine, remains an unexplored chance to make a break from the unfulfilling life she is leading. Roswitha shows she is unable to impose her will on the events, and her rebellion only takes place in the form of that irrational joy she experiences at the idea of being pregnant.

Although her rebellion is not a radical one, but only consists in smashing the toilet and deciding abruptly to go to church on Christmas Eve,

the unconventional behaviour of the female protagonist of 'Kirchgang' seems nevertheless a progression from Roswitha's determination to repress her real feelings. A few elements indicate that, in comparison to Roswitha, this woman is more in touch with her feelings and therefore has more chances of breaking free. For example, the story is written in the first person which, in contrast to the impersonal third person narrator of 'Unterbrechung', gives the idea of the character's ability to deal with her own emotions. Furthermore, the fact that she does something unusual disrupting her routine seems a sign that she can change. Unfortunately, this glimpse of hope only survives until it is clear that she is completely unaware of what she is doing and cannot explain her deeds. This sense of a lack of alternative perspectives is furthermore emphasised by the fact that her unusual behaviour does not even trigger off reactions in her family members who just dismiss it.

This story is nevertheless important because by introducing a female character whose background presents many similarities with that of Roswitha - they are both successful, but unfulfilled working mothers of grown-up children, have a cold relationship to their family and, more importantly, have always adapted themselves to society's expectations⁵³ - Königsdorf turns the problem of women's dissatisfaction from an individual case into a general situation. In this way, it becomes clear that she is not dealing with individual deficiencies, but rather with issues concerning the whole of society. The idea of society's shortcomings turning people into repressed individuals is furthermore emphasised with the description of the church experience. While Königsdorf underplays the religious aspect of it, she instead draws attention to the fact that the Christmas service was for many an emotional outlet, and in this sense very appealing.

⁵³ This is, for instance, how the main character in 'Kirchgang' describes herself at the onset of the story: 'Sorgfältig vermied ich alles, was einem untadeligen Lebenswandel entgegenstand' (LV, 136).

The pressure to conform is also the theme of 'Reise im Winter', although here the focus is on the fact that this pressure is the possible reason why some citizens were starting to lose faith in the system. The story opens with the scene of a woman and a man sharing the same compartment on a train, at dusk. While the woman has already acknowledged the tight boundaries between which her life has taken place, symbolised by a valley and its restricted view of the horizon, the man is satisfied with his petty vision of the world. For instance, while he is worried about having to behave chivalrously towards the woman by having to lend her his thick coat - it is snowing outside and the train is delayed -, she is trying to articulate her loss of hope. The fact that she has a deeper understanding of reality is also shown by the introduction of a third person narrator who nevertheless tells the story from the perspective of the man. This has the effect that the man, who does not have anything to say for himself, takes on the role of the reader, to whom the woman's words are not communicated as a search for meaning, but rather as definite statements, on which she has apparently reflected for a long time.

Such statements portray reality as very bleak. The woman is completely disillusioned; she talks about a 'qualvollen Verlust an Utopie', a 'Mangel an Imagination' (LV, 155), about the fact that people do not have any illusions about what they could find 'hinter dem Schnee' (LV, 156). Yet, Claudia Schmidt points out that '[d]as exakte Benennen des Scheiterns und der Hoffnungslosigkeit impliziert zugleich die Möglichkeit der Transzendierung des schlechten Bestehenden'.⁵⁴ This is confirmed by the fact that while the train stops briefly in the open fields, she nonetheless decides to rebel against this stagnating situation by going '[a]uf der Suche nach etwas hinter dem Schnee' (LV, 159). Even though she is clearly disillusioned, she still accepts the challenge. In this manner, she makes sure

⁵⁴ Schmidt, C., *Ruckzüge und Aufbrüche* [see note 51 above], 101.

that she has explored everything within her power to improve her existence in contrast to the two previous examples.⁵⁵

Although the woman does not grasp anything new about herself and society, the key aspect of this story is that her unconventional behaviour does nevertheless have an impact on her silent interlocutor. Despite her disappearance, she has left a trace of herself by challenging the man's sense of reality. Even if now the image of the woman on the train is fading fast, to the point that he is no longer sure of her existence, nothing seems more real than the abstractness of her goal to look for something behind the snow:

Aber etwas ist geblieben. Eine Vorstellung. Eine Vorstellung, die über dieses Abteil, diesen Wagen, diesen Zug, den Schnee hinausgeht. Eine Vorstellung von einer Frau, die den Zug bei einem Halt auf freier Strecke verlassen hat. Eine Vorstellung von einer Frau, die vornübergebeugt durch den Schnee stapft, um etwas hinter dem Schnee zu suchen. Und diese gesichtslose Frau erreicht ein höheres Maß an Wirklichkeit für ihn als das Abteil und der Zug, der wieder in der Zeit liegt und pünktlich angekommen wird. Ein höheres Maß an Wirklichkeit als die Einsamkeit, die ihn plötzlich umgibt. (LV, 160)

⁵⁵ Ricarda Schmidt points out that by describing the female protagonist of 'Reise im Winter' as the one who has the courage to jump out of the train, Königsdorf raises her status to that of a 'mythical resistance figure'. According to Schmidt, in this manner Königsdorf is going back to 'the traditional device of situating femininity outside history as an ideal for men within history'. See Schmidt, R., 'History Reflected in the Imaginary: Pre-revolutionary Attitudes towards the Process of History in Works by Christa Wolf, Helga Königsdorf, Angela Krauss and Irina Liebmann', in Williams, A. and Parkes, S. (eds), *The Individual, Identity and Innovation: Signals from Contemporary Literature and the New Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 165-181. Personally, I believe that Königsdorf chooses a woman to challenge society's resigned attitude as embodied by the man precisely because women have only now started to be included in the historical process and consequently have more energy than men to explore new paths. This is confirmed by her statement about women being 'etwas mehr im Aufbruch' and men being static (see Introduction of this chapter). My view is in line with Eva Kaufmann's description of the female figures in *Lichtverhältnisse* as 'Trägerinnen alternativer Impulse oder Lebenshaltungen' in her article 'Adieu Cassandra? Schriftstellerinnen aus der DDR vor, in und nach der Wende' [see note 22 of the Introduction], 220. I discuss this point also in section 1.7.

1.6 *Respektloser Umgang*: Critical Reflections on the Issue of Emancipation

The search for one's own identity is also the main theme of Königsdorf's first novel, *Respektloser Umgang*, in which the protagonist, faced by an unspecified life-threatening illness, tries to confront the truth of her existence. Despite the fact that it was published in 1986 and therefore is located chronologically amongst the collections of short stories, the tone of *Respektloser Umgang* is much less pessimistic and its final message is full of hope. Apart from the changes of genre and of tone, there is another important element distinguishing this novel from the first collections of short stories. *Respektloser Umgang* seems in fact to mark the point in time at which Königsdorf becomes aware that she is writing not solely as a means of understanding herself better, but also because she wants to have an impact on society through her work: 'Erst habe ich wohl bloß einfach Geschichten erzählen und mich selbst erweitern wollen, befreien von einer Einengung. Später kam natürlich dieses Bewußtsein hinzu, etwas machen, etwas ändern zu wollen'.⁵⁶

As I have anticipated in the introduction, despite the fact that the discussion of women-centred issues is only one of its many important themes, *Respektloser Umgang* is the best example to demonstrate the limits of labelling Königsdorf 'only' as a feminist writer. In fact, it offers the most complete picture of her attitude vis-à-vis emancipation, which previously she had analysed in snapshots of real life in the short stories. It is also fundamental to stress once more that what emerges from this work is not so much a new, revolutionary line of feminist thought, but rather a message based on the promotion of the emancipation of mankind in general, which I described earlier as 'Individualhumanismus'.

⁵⁶ 'Zurück in die Alltagsgeschichte', interview with Gaus, G., *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, Vol. 42, No. 5, 1994, 78-92 (here 91).

From the first collection of short stories on she intentionally avoids separatist attitudes, but chiefly aims to outline the stereotypes which make it difficult for both men and women to break away from the traditional division of roles. Hence, even though she mainly deals with women in line with her own experience, she also takes account of men's disorientation vis-à-vis women's integration into the economic world. Thus, in 'Pi', Königsdorf mentions the discomfort of a man living in a situation in which the roles have been reversed as he finds himself becoming the partner of his boss (LD, 81). A similar kind of male disorientation is presented through the male figure in 'Ehrenwort - Ich will nie wieder dichten', who complains about the lack of role models for men whose wives, as in his case, have become successful. Since his wife has just discovered her talents as a poet, with this story Königsdorf also draws attention to the fact that literature has always been a male-dominated field, in which women have only played a secondary role (LD, 13).⁵⁷

Success or the lack thereof is another theme which Königsdorf introduces when talking about men. The female protagonist of 'Die Wahrheit über Schorsch' observes for instance that 'Ein Mann ohne Erfolg war kein Mann. Eine Frau in der gleichen Lage blieb immerhin eine Frau' (LD, 47-48). A similar issue is raised in 'Liriodendron tulipifera', in which the main character wonders whether she is guilty of having put too much pressure on her husband to be successful. This possibility leads her to think that maybe this was why he started repressing his feelings and real identity.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ I also deal with this story in the context of self-censorship in section 3.2.1.

⁵⁸ The theme of the pressure exercised by the wife on her husband to achieve more is also one of the main themes of Erich Loest's *Es geht seinen Gang oder Mühen in unserer Ebene* (Munich: dtv, 1980), first published in 1978. While the protagonist of the novel is content with her job and his family life, his wife insists that he should try to be promoted. As it is clear that he has got no intention of doing so, the marriage falls apart.

Hence, the short stories show that the intense performance pressure, characteristic of GDR society, was a problem which, even if for different reasons, affected men and women alike. In *Respektloser Umgang*, Königsdorf deals with it particularly with regard to women, focusing on the pressure they endure to excel in their profession in order to enhance their self-worth and establish their position, while still occupying the more traditional roles of housewife and mother.⁵⁹ This was especially true of women of Königsdorf's generation, the first ones who tried to integrate themselves into traditionally male-dominated environments. The narrator in *Respektloser Umgang*, for instance, whose ambitions are orientated towards the domain of physics, finds herself confronted with the pressure of having to do extraordinarily well in order to have some career opportunities, and with the fear that her desire to form a family might be an obstacle to her professional success. Hence, even if she was a good student, this did not necessarily open the door to the world of physics, and the reason is that '[sie] wollte außerdem Frau sein' (RU, 26). Although she recognises that 'Haß, der aus Diskriminierung erwächst, kann eine gewaltige Triebkraft sein' (RU, 26), the pressure she experiences is such that at times she feels completely disheartened: 'Manchmal wollte ich gar nicht stark sein. Träumte den Traum vom überlegenen Beschützer. Einmal wieder Kind sein dürfen. Dafür hätte ich auf die ganze Emanzipation gepfiffen' (RU, 56).

There is no doubt however that the narrator's experience of discrimination is very mild if compared to that of the late Lise Meitner.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ This theme is discussed by many GDR women authors. To cite an example, in Irmtraud Morgner's fantasy novel *Trobadora Beatriz*, one of the characters of the stories told by Laura, in order to combine her job with the duties of motherhood, has to use a tight-rope stretching between her home and her place of employment as a shortcut to save time. Eventually she loses her balance and dies. See Morgner, I., *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz* [see note 40 above], 388-394.

⁶⁰ For a more detailed study on a comparison between Lise Meitner as an historical figure and as presented by Königsdorf, see Clausen, J., 'Resisting Objectification: Helga Königsdorf's Lise Meitner', in Gerber, M. (ed.), *Studies in GDR Culture and Society 10* (Lanham; London: University Press of America, 1991), 165-180. When I mention Lise Meitner, I always refer to Königsdorf's fictional figure.

Although the famous physicist is clearly an hallucination - a side-effect of the potent hallucinogens that the narrator is taking to combat her illness - she has a life of her own which enables her to become the narrator's conversation partner.⁶¹ Hence, the two women engage in a dialogue, which stimulates the protagonist to re-assess both her past and present and, as she is approaching death, encourages her not to close in on herself, but open herself up to others. Through the 'Relativierung des Ichs', which makes 'die eigene Existenz noch ertragbar' (RU, 27), she understands that her life still has a sense and that she is not the only one who has suffered. Thus, the meeting with Lise Meitner, who like her had chosen the same traditionally male career - they are both physicists, whose career was abruptly interrupted (in Meitner's case she had to flee Germany in 1938, the day on which the narrator was born, because of her Jewish origins)⁶² - helps the narrator to see her life as a woman in relative terms.

From the onset, the narrator recognises that in order for Meitner to establish herself as a physicist she had to work under a very strong 'Leistungszwang [...]. Wie ein Mann. Mehr als ein Mann' (RU, 11). Because of the energy and time she had to devote to science in order to have a chance to succeed, Meitner, who was the second woman to graduate in physics at the University of Vienna, had to sacrifice her womanhood to her career. The Institute for Chemistry, where she worked as Hahn's assistant, who luckily 'hatte nichts gegen Frauen' (RU, 24), became her family (RU, 43), even though at the beginning she could not even access it through the main door, and was only allowed to work in a laboratory in the basement - at least until women were given permission to study in Prussia too.

⁶¹ Meitner's figure progresses from being an hallucination to being part of the narrator (RU, 13), until the narrator actually discovers herself being Meitner (RU, 71).

⁶² This is very close to Königsdorf's biography since while she was born on 13 July 1938, Meitner left Germany on 14 July 1938.

Even though Max Planck believed in nature having predetermined a woman's duties as housewife and mother, it was thanks to the fact that he recognised Meitner's exceptional talent that she entered the physicists' circle in Berlin. As she is telling her story, it is obvious that she understandably prides herself on her exceptional status. Nevertheless, the toughness of the competition and the bitterness of having had to give up the possibility of romance and motherhood convince her that the only way to be a scientist is to sacrifice everything else. Only by rejecting every other life pattern can she justify to herself the necessity of her sacrifices, and thus maintain her uniqueness, which even at that time was overshadowed by Irène Curie who did not have to renounce her femininity to pursue her scientific interests:

Sie protestiert nicht gegen die darin enthaltene Abwertung ihres Geschlechts. Sie ist die Ausnahme. Sie ist nicht gegen weitere Ausnahmen. Soweit tritt sie für Gleichberechtigung ein. Aber nicht für die Frau, die alles sein will: Geliebte, Mutter, Wissenschaftlerin. Für die nicht. Die macht sich verdächtig. Irène Curie etwa. Die große Konkurrentin. Für die nicht. (RU, 45)

Although it is understandable why Meitner had to justify to herself the price she paid to affirm herself as a scientist, her acceptance of the status quo, her pride in being the only exception, her lack of solidarity towards other women even years after her death disqualify her from becoming a role model of female resistance. Instead of campaigning for change in the working environment and exploring new possibilities, Meitner is still putting forward the conservative and discriminatory view that women can become scientists only at the expense of their womanhood like she did. She even challenges the narrator by asking her how things are organised in her society after provoking her with questions about how many Nobel Prize winners there are in the GDR (RU, 57-58). In this way, similarly to the mother figures described in stories such as 'Die Wahrheit über Schorsch', instead of trying to break through traditional patterns of behaviour, she perpetuates them. For the narrator, struggling to reconcile her passion for physics with the fact that she would like to have a family, Meitner is not a

figure from whom she can draw inspiration, but, as discussed above, a stimulus to re-assess herself.⁶³

Furthermore, Meitner fails to be a role model for the protagonist also in respect to the fact that she always had to conduct herself like a man. Hence, she cannot be of any help to the main character who was educated by her father to behave like a man, but who, once she reached the age of puberty, was orientated towards a female role. In this light, the choice of physics might therefore be seen as her way to try and establish a balance between her male and female sides as well as an overt rejection of the role that her mother had to take on.

However, the decision to dedicate herself to a typically male subject is not enough to solve the gender crisis she is going through. At the beginning she even rejects her female identity by stating: '[a]ls soziales Wesen wäre ich lieber ein Mann' (RU, 22), which would have made much easier her integration and development as a scientist. From a certain point of view, her confusion seems to be a direct consequence of the GDR's failure to transform itself from a patriarchal into a modern society orientated towards the emancipation of the individual. As a result, the narrator is prevented from finding her real identity, for her rejection of a conventional female role makes her feel guilty and stops her from feeling completely adequate in her male-dominated working environment: 'Ich bin eine Abtrünnige und demzufolge sitzen Vorbehalte und Herablassung tiefer. Der Riß geht mitten durch mich hindurch' (RU, 55).

⁶³ The 'disrespectful' way - to paraphrase the title of the novel - in which Königsdorf depicts Meitner challenges the portrayal of the scientist made by Renate Feyl in her work *Der lautlose Aufbruch*, which first appeared in 1981. See Feyl, R., 'Lise Meitner, 1878-1968', in *Der lautlose Aufbruch* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1985), 178-191. As Jeanette Clausen has pointed out, while Königsdorf rejects the idea of the role model, Feyl transforms Lise Meitner into a 'superwoman-victim', attributing strengths to her normally 'allowed to women by the conventional stereotype'. See Clausen J., 'Resisting Objectification' [see note 60 above], 172-173. The first time that Feyl dealt with Lise Meitner, focusing in particular on her scientific achievements, was in her work *Bilder ohne Rahmen* (Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1985), 181-198, first published in 1977.

Apart from her job being a source of confusion, probably the main reasons behind her crisis are the strongly male-orientated education she received from the father and, in particular, the awareness that he wanted a son. His longing for a son has to be understood in the context of the Second World War. In fact, as he was half-Jewish, the possibility of having a male child for him represented 'eine Art persönlichen Widerstandes. Ein Stück Selbstbehauptung. Das Bestreben [...], sich nicht zum Objekt machen zu lassen' (RU, 53).⁶⁴ The fact that in the end he had a daughter seemed to him a failure to assert his dignity and that is why, in order to be able to love her, he had to treat her, at least until she reached puberty, as a boy.

Not surprisingly, this behaviour of the father does not remain without consequences for the protagonist. While throughout her life she tries to overcome her uneasiness by becoming almost dependent on success as a way to define herself and bridge her insecurities,⁶⁵ it is only at the end of this process of reassessment, in which she faces her real self, that she learns to accept herself fully as a woman. Thus, she can finally answer the question whether she would rather be a man without hesitations: 'Jetzt bin ich lieber eine Frau' (RU, 85). As Eva Kaufmann has argued, this is possible, 'weil sie sich inzwischen die tief in der Familiengeschichte liegenden Ursachen für das eigene Rollenverhalten bewußt gemacht hat'.⁶⁶

In her attempt to understand how to live without being conditioned by society's projections and pre-ordained roles, she stumbles upon one of the most important literary works of the 1980s especially with regard to the feminist debate, Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*.⁶⁷ In particular, she finds herself reflecting on a passage in which Wolf asserts that throughout history

⁶⁴ I discuss this point in more detail in the context of Königsdorf's Jewish identity in section 4.2.1.

⁶⁵ 'Ich hatte doch Erfolge aufzuweisen. Aber das nützte gar nichts. Im Gegenteil. Jeder Erfolg erhöhte die Diskrepanz. Ich haßte ihn und war süchtig danach' (RU, 51).

⁶⁶ Kaufmann, E., 'Haltung nehmen', 285-286.

⁶⁷ This work is actually formed by two main parts integrating with each other: the non-fictional texts contained in *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra* (where Königsdorf takes the quote from) and the novel *Kassandra*.

women have always been objects, or rather second-class objects because objectified by men who are themselves objects.⁶⁸ Although this seems logical, she finds it difficult to accept the idea implicit in Wolf's statement that individuals are not autonomous and capable of resisting the objectification process set into motion by those manipulating power. Furthermore, she rejects the separation between men and women, who, according to Wolf's statement, have lived different histories and therefore have developed a different perspective over the course of the centuries. By contrast, Königsdorf finds it counter-productive to underline the differences between the genders. Instead, she believes that in order to create a society in which every individual can be free 'das Wichtigste ist, sich gemeinsam gegen das Zum-Objekt-gemacht-werden zu wehren'.⁶⁹

Despite the fact that she does not accept what Wolf is arguing in this passage, Wolf's ideas are nevertheless important because they stimulate the narrator to form her own opinion on this issue. Consequently, she opposes the 1970s idea of female self-fulfilment, seen in terms of the image of a woman being successful in all spheres of life, and protests against the pressure to conform to the standards set by society, for she sees them as leading to the suppression of an individual's pace and rhythm. Against the performance pressure exercised by society, she puts forward the idea of respect for one's own person and for others, in order not to be objectified by society's mechanisms. Instead of measuring oneself against society's high targets, she encourages people to find their own standard: 'Man muß seinen Ausschnitt suchen. Das starre Rollenspiel durchbrechen' (RU, 56).

⁶⁸ This is the passage cited by Königsdorf: 'Inwieweit gibt es wirklich "weibliches" Schreiben? Insoweit Frauen aus historischen und biologischen Gründen eine andere Wirklichkeit erleben als Männer. Wirklichkeit anders erleben als Männer und dies ausdrücken. Insoweit Frauen nicht zu den Herrschenden, sondern zu den Beherrschten gehören, jahrhundertlang, zu den Objekten der Objekte. Objekte zweiten Grades, oft genug Objekte von Männern, die selbst Objekte sind ...' (RU, 54).

⁶⁹ Königsdorf made this statement in an interview with Ulli Klausmann, 'Die Naturwissenschaftlerin und Schriftstellerin'. The interview was conducted during the programme *Der Büchermarkt, Deutschlandfunk*, 01.12.1987.

1.7 The Treatment of Women's Issues in the Post-Unification Novels

The years 1989-90 represented for many East German women both the collapse of their system of values and the loss, in many cases, of their financial independence and of all those facilities which allowed them to combine their job with motherhood. In this sense, women are often referred to as the *Verliererinnen* ('losers') of unification. Around this time of transition, Königsdorf concentrated mainly on coming to terms with the collapse of the GDR and the process of unification. On the one hand, one could say that she left women's issues on one side. On the other hand, however, this is in line with her concern with mankind; in fact, it would not have made sense in a time of profound disorientation and change to focus only on the female part of the population. Therefore, women's issues are not specifically dealt with in Königsdorf's post-unification work, but nevertheless continue to be present in the wider context of society's problems. An example of this is *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, written in 1993, in which:

[d]ie Stoffe werden nicht vordringlich des weiblichen Interesses wegen ausgewählt, in jedem Fall aber die in ihnen enthaltenen krisenhaften Geschlechtsverhältnisse scharf ausgeleuchtet. Dieses Engagement für die Frau ist ebenso zuverlässig wie unauffällig.⁷⁰

This novel deals in fact with the difficulties of five characters in coming to terms with the changes brought about by unification. Women-related issues emerge in particular with regard to the figure of Alice, a very talented scientist who was made redundant after the events of 1989-90. As opposed to the characters in Königsdorf's previous works, who tended to be ordinary, Alice distinguishes herself in her capacity as an exceptionally talented mathematician, recognised as such around the world. Königsdorf's decision to talk about somebody so extraordinary has the effect of underlining the gravity of the situation faced by women in the post-

⁷⁰ Kaufmann, E., 'Adieu Cassandra? Schriftstellerinnen aus der DDR vor, in und nach der Wende', 223.

unification phase. In fact, if even gifted women find it virtually impossible to re-integrate themselves into the working environment and society in general - Alice ends up becoming a tramp - one can suppose that ordinary women have even less chance of finding a job. Another element underlining this difficulty faced by women in finding new employment is also the fact that of the five characters, only the man, referred to only as 'der Alte', even though he has to swallow his pride, succeeds in re-integrating himself into the working environment.⁷¹ Therefore, we can conclude that if, before 1989, women were seen as being unökonomisch⁷², they seem to make even less sense in the market economy, which offered nothing to a large part of the female labour force.⁷³

Surprisingly, Königsdorf carries on the pre-1989 discussion of women trying to achieve self-realisation in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* which appeared in 1997. This is a novel about a family, the Schraders, trying to cope with an old grandmother, who eventually is got rid of by the father. Even if it is similar to *Respektloser Umgang* in the sense that the preoccupation with women's issues is not the predominant theme, Königsdorf continues through Frau Schrader to explore the difficulties of self-fulfilment faced specifically by women in modern society. While many of the old themes re-emerge, such as the feeling of *Einengung*,⁷⁴ there are nevertheless new elements. For instance, while Königsdorf appears to be returning to the portrayal of ordinary women, she depicts in Frau Schrader a woman who is very similar to her previous female figures - she

⁷¹ In section 5.3.2.2 I closely assess the process of re-integration of the *Alte*.

⁷² This expression is used by Britt, the young woman in 'Unverhoffter Besuch' (LD, 185).

⁷³ From 1991 to 1997 the percentage of women unemployed rose from 15% to 22.4%. See Nickel, H. M., 'Wendegewinnerinnen, Wendeverliererinnen', *Freitag*, 05.11.1999. Furthermore, since 1991 the number of unemployed women has been about double that of men. In 1995, for instance, 18.7% of women were unemployed and 10.1% of men. See Winkler, G., (ed.), *Sozialreport 1995*, Sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungszentrum Berlin-Brandenburg (Berlin: Hans Böckler-Stiftung, 1995) 95-100, cited by Sourbut, C. A., *Construction of Motherhood: Representations and Realities of Women's Experiences as Mothers in the former GDR under State Socialism and Capitalism* (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), University of Bath, 1997.

⁷⁴ I first introduced the idea of *Einengung* in section 1.3.1.

is a middle-aged mother of two grown-up children - with the significant difference that she has never worked outside the household.

As a consequence of this, her feeling of *Einengung* is provoked by regret at having given up the opportunity to study for a Ph.D. degree in order to marry Schrader and start a family. Now that her children are grown up and the grandmother has disappeared, she is hit by a crisis characterised by the feeling of not being needed any longer,⁷⁵ which is intensified by her continuously imagining the kind of career she could have had. Her dissatisfaction with her life is furthermore increased by the fact that her sacrifices in putting aside her ambitions in order to dedicate all her time to her children have not paid off. Similarly to the situation in 'Unterbrechung', her children - especially Franziska, to whom she clumsily tries to offer some friendship - appear to be incapable of understanding the frustrations she is going through. This was true also of the period when the ill grandmother was still in the house, as nobody ever made an effort to help her to look after the old woman. This stresses once more the patriarchal nature of the family structure and of society in general, in which the care of the elderly and the children is assumed to be a woman's task.

The fact that she feels trapped is particularly evident when she tries but fails to enter the working environment through a friend she had not seen for a long time who, after meeting her, decides not to make her an offer (EG, 76). Her desire to work originates from the fact that, after spending many years of her life sacrificing herself for her family, she feels it is high time to do something exclusively for herself. In an effort to change her self-effacing attitude, finding a job is her first attempt to recover her identity and re-establish touch with her own feelings and needs.

⁷⁵ 'Sie müßte eigentlich zufrieden sein. Aber sie fühlt sich allein und ausgestoßen. Ausgestoßen aus jeder menschlichen Gemeinschaft. Sie wird nicht mehr gebraucht' (EG, 42).

Despite her frustrations, Frau Schrader demonstrates on more than one occasion that she is a strong person who has the courage to react. When the situation becomes really critical, for example after her son's nervous breakdown, she is able to face reality, as opposed to her husband who looks for easy ways out of his problems - as exemplified by his decision to dump the grandmother when it became hard to look after her. Frau Schrader is also the one who, more than anybody else in the novel, seems to be able to feel, whether it is love or hate. She has, for example, the courage to admit that at times the behaviour of the grandmother had provoked in her feelings of hate.⁷⁶

By the end of the novel, after the family has fallen apart following the discovery that Herr Schrader has abandoned the grandmother, she manages to find her independence and start a completely new life. She will in fact get a divorce and open a guest house. Her daughter as well, in spite of her very young age, is able to break free from her parental home to start pursuing her own dreams. Therefore, while the women in the family find the energy to start afresh, the men appear to be much less determined and more attached to traditional patterns. Thomas, for example, despite not showing much consideration for his parents, is not courageous enough to move out. If at the end he leaves, it is mainly because of Frau Schrader's ultimatum. At the same time, Herr Schrader's understanding of his role as the family's breadwinner has the consequence that after he loses his post - he does not have the courage to tell his family about it -, in order to continue to fulfil his task, he accepts a job in which he has to endure exploitation and the arrogance of his younger colleagues. Despite the fact that the situation makes him suffer from stomach cramps, he puts up with it because otherwise he would have to regard himself as a 'failure'.⁷⁷ Even

⁷⁶ 'Manchmal hatte Frau Schrader ihre Mutter regelrecht gehaßt' (EG, 12). In the end it is not Frau Schrader but her husband, who abandons the grandmother. This is very ironical because Herr Schrader had always defended the grandmother for fear of losing the house she had decided to leave to him since she trusted him more than her own daughter.

⁷⁷ "“Wer wirklich arbeiten will, der findet etwas”, sagt er jetzt. [...] Sagt es aber auch, um

the decision to abandon the grandmother can be seen in this framework as the reaction of a man wanting to protect his family. It is then clear that Herr Schrader is constantly measuring himself against the standards set by society instead of trying to find his own dimension.

In a way, Königsdorf seems to imply that women have more resources and energy than men, especially when faced with a difficult situation. From this point of view, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* seems to continue a theme which she had only touched upon in *Lichtverhältnisse* with the stories 'Sachschaden' and 'Reise im Winter', in which women are presented as 'Trägerinnen alternativer Impulse oder Lebenshaltungen'.⁷⁸ In these stories, women show a kind of sensitivity which men, used to disregarding the emotional side of life as unimportant, are unable to reciprocate. Thus, the protagonist of 'Sachschaden' is the only one who worries about a young boy who has damaged a car with his moped. While everybody else is concerned about the cost of the damage, she tries to offer him some comfort. However, she is not assertive enough to make the other people on the scene see the fear and the malaise of the young moped driver. In the end, she sees herself forced to give up trying to help him and goes back home. In 'Reise im Winter', the courage of the female protagonist to go and look for something meaningful even though she is aware that her search could be in vain, is contrasted with the complacency of the man sitting opposite her on the train. Finally, the extra energy and sensitivity which Königsdorf attributes to women might also be the reason why in *Respektloser Umgang* the 'Totengesellschaft' - the council of dead which is supposed to judge the protagonist - decides that it needs a woman to carry out successfully the uncompleted 'Auftrag' (RU, 48-49).⁷⁹

klarzustellen, daß man ihn nicht als Versager einstufen kann' (EG, 14).

⁷⁸ See note 55 above.

⁷⁹ Nancy Lauckner expands on this point by drawing attention to the fact that it echoes the views already expressed by Irmtraud Morgner in *Amanda* and Christa Wolf in *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra* about women having to play an important role in the face of the threat of nuclear destruction. See Lauckner, N. A., 'The Treatment of the Past and Future in Helga Königsdorf's "Respektloser Umgang": "Sich der Erinnerung weihen oder für die Zukunft

Despite its sombre atmosphere, in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, as mentioned above, women are represented as more resourceful than men as they are able to react and use their potential. After Königsdorf's many female figures of the 1980s who were unable to liberate themselves, Frau Schrader is a positive heroine (in the post-Socialist Realism sense of the word) setting the example of how it is possible to create one's own independence. Even if she breaks free only after her existence has been turned upside down by the discovery that her husband has dumped the grandmother, it is nevertheless remarkable that she recognises this 'Unterbrechung' of her routine as her chance to change her life, something which characters such as Roswitha were unable to do.

However, if Frau Schrader does grasp the opportunity to find self-fulfilment, it is also because of the process of self-reassessment which she undergoes throughout the book. This gives her the necessary maturity to make important discoveries about the condition of women. For instance, she becomes aware that self-realisation does not come from the fulfilment of the expectations that we place on others, but that it can only come from within. She also recognises that her self-sacrificing attitude in the end only reflected a lack of respect for herself. Re-echoing the final message of *Respektloser Umgang*, which is also focused on the concept of respect, Frau Schrader comprehends that she has to stop feeling guilty for the way her family fell apart, and to start instead paying more respect to herself:

antreten? Mit der Vergangenheit im Bunde", in Gerber, M. (ed.), *Studies in GDR Culture and Society 10* (Lanham; London: University Press of America, 1991), 151-163. Although I have argued that women in Königsdorf's work can be seen as 'Trägerinnen neuer Impulse', this does not necessarily imply that women can do so because they have never been involved in history, as Christa Wolf asserts, but because at this point in time they are more dynamic and ready to change, 'etwas mehr im Aufbruch'. In this respect, Jeanette Clausen has remarked in her article 'Resisting Objectification' that Königsdorf, through her portrayal of Lise Meitner, is distancing herself from the view that women have had no involvement in the production of tools for the destruction of mankind. Nevertheless, even if this might be true, I also believe it is important to stress the fact that Königsdorf insists on the fact that Meitner's exceptional status. In my opinion, the real difference between Königsdorf's position and that of other authors is that she never advocates the separation of the genders, she rejects the idea that men and women have different perceptions of reality, and promotes solidarity among all individuals, regardless of their gender. See also section 1.6.

Sie will sich nicht mehr grämen, nicht wegen Kindern, die sie verachteten. [...] Sie will sich nicht mehr mit der Frage quälen, was sie falsch gemacht hat. Ihre Kinder waren erwachsen und für sich selbst verantwortlich. Sie will nie mehr um Liebe betteln. Sie gesteht sich für alles, was geschehen war, mildernde Umstände zu. Nur für eines nicht. Nicht dafür, daß sie schlecht mit sich selbst umgegangen ist. (EG, 90)

1.8 The Exploration of Alternative Lifestyles: the Theme of Homosexuality

The theme of women's issues in Königsdorf's post-unification works at first seems weak when compared to the frequency and the depth with which it is examined in her pre-1989 fiction. However, the balance is immediately redressed if under Königsdorf's identity as a woman writer one also includes her discussion of gender issues such as homosexuality. The first time Königsdorf approached this theme was in *Ungelegener Befund*,⁸⁰ her last work written in the GDR, where homosexuality remains in the background of the life of a scientist assailed by the suspicion that his father might have been involved with Nazi medical experiments on human beings. Dieter Jhanz, the protagonist of this novel, is in love with one of his students, Felix K. He also has an epistolary relationship to someone he calls Felix, who sometimes coincides with the real Felix K., but most of the time remains a creation of Dieter's mind and fulfils his need to communicate his thoughts and feelings (UB, 13). As the letters addressed to Felix are never sent, they come across as a sort of personal diary, in which the reader can meet the real Dieter.

Conforming and adapting oneself to the system, thus hiding one's true identity, is in fact one of the main themes of this novel. Here, it is

⁸⁰ In her article 'Botschaft aus einem seltsamen Land', Brigid Haines points out that *Ungelegener Befund* was misinterpreted as Königsdorf's dismissal of feminism because most of the characters are men. Even worse, some critics failed to see it as a development of her thinking on issues of gender. By contrast, in her article she sheds light on three different questions of gender which this work presents. These include a Freudian reading based on the supposition that Dieter Jhanz suffers from an Oedipal crisis, a second one highlighting the GDR's attitude to homosexuality and a third one pointing out women's complicity in fascism. This latter point emerges from some of the letters which are a reaction to Dieter's decision not to have the home for handicapped children named after his father. In my analysis, as the focus is on the possibility of breaking away from conventional patterns, I have mainly taken into consideration the second reading of the text suggested by Haines [see note 25 of the Introduction].

explored from two different angles and time frames, first with regard to Dieter's father, who might have been a Nazi, and also in today's context as Dieter has to come to terms with the fact that he too, like his father, a 'Mitschwimmer' (UB, 99).⁸¹ This is shown by the fact that he does not protest against society's rejection of his sexual choice. Instead he passively accepts to be humiliated, for example by his neighbours who ignore him (UB, 27).

Despite the fact that the GDR was a society in which 'heterosexuality [was] compulsory',⁸² as exemplified by the importance given to the family, often hailed as 'the smallest cell of socialist society',⁸³ this work does not try to draw attention to the social and political discrimination suffered by homosexuals. It limits itself to reproducing the GDR's social model, which forced homosexuals to remain invisible within society, in the way it places homosexuality in the background of the novel. In fact, even though homosexuality was decriminalised in 1968,⁸⁴ homosexuals saw themselves obliged to hide their sexuality in public and were heavily discriminated against. Not only did they have to cope with being outsiders in a society which did not allow alternative lifestyles to that of heterosexuality, but they were also persecuted by the State Security

⁸¹ I also discuss why Dieter Jhanz defines himself as a 'Mitschwimmer' in section 2.2.3.2.

⁸² This quote is from Adrienne Rich and it has been cited by Georgina Paul in her article, 'Über Verschwiegenges sprechen' [see note 29 of the Introduction], 227.

⁸³ Kolinsky, E., *Women in Contemporary Germany* [see note 49 above], 261. Kolinsky also explains that the supportive attitude towards the family was justified on economic grounds (the government supported the family not only ideologically, but also financially. Married couples had for example more chances of being allocated a flat, especially if they were expecting a child. Furthermore, it offered interest-free loans – reduced every time a child was born – to new couples in order to help them to set up their home). In the first years of its existence, the GDR lacked human capital. Hence, it launched several measures in order to promote reproduction, such as child allowances, maternity benefits, paid parental leave, employment guarantees and institutional provision for child care, as the future development of the Eastern Germany into a modern industrial country depended very much on this. It has also been observed that to support family structures was the best way to make sure that the government could have control over the education of the new generation. The combination of viewing employment as the duty of every citizen of a socialist state and encouraging the establishment of families offered an opportunity to the government to help the families in the care of their children, and thus to influence strongly the ideological formation of the younger generation.

⁸⁴ Homosexuality was decriminalised in 1968 with the deletion of § 174 of the *Strafgesetzbuch* (StGB).

Service (*Stasi*). They were seen by the state as a potential threat to the established order, and to acknowledge their existence, for example by giving them permission to gather in public places such as bars or clubs, was considered as a threat to the moral welfare of young people. The state made it clear that it was supportive only of those relationships that ‘in erster Linie dem Ziel der Erhaltung der Gesellschaft (Erhaltung der Art) dienen’.⁸⁵

Instead of politicising the issue of homosexuality, Königsdorf prefers to focus on the theme of the pressure to conform imposed by GDR society as well as on the need to belong as a basic human need. The combination of these two elements has the effect that even an homosexual such as Dieter turns into a ‘Mitschwimmer’ (UB, 99) because of his need of ‘Tradition und Heimat’ (UB, 30). Hence, while on the one hand the fact that he is gay makes him an outsider, on the other hand, because of his strong need to belong, he denies the contradictions generated by his being different. He does so by conforming, by accepting compromises to the point of constantly lying to himself. This apparent normality is disrupted by the discovery that his father might have been a Nazi, which confronts him with those fundamental questions he had never had the courage to face. It is in this turmoil of emotions that he starts seeing the lies which had characterised his life:

Ich lernte, mich zu verhalten. Auch mein Anderssein warf seinen Schatten. Ich war nicht wirklich zugehörig, ich mußte mich tarnen. Mein Verhalten wurde zum dauernden Manöver, in dem die Täuschung das Eigentliche war. (UB, 103)

Ungelegener Befund and *Gleich neben Afrika* are the only two works dealing with homosexuality within Königsdorf’s literary production, but they have little in common apart from this theme, possibly because they were written at very different historical moments, namely just before and shortly after unification. Hence, *Ungelegener Befund* can be read as one of

⁸⁵ Georgina Paul, ‘Über Verschwiegendes sprechen’, 228.

Königsdorf's many works in which she aims to illustrate the importance of having the courage but also the opportunity to express one's own identity. This is in line with the women-centred works of the pre-1989 period, in which Königsdorf's main concern revolves around the respect for one's own individuality. Perhaps it even represents a development of this concern, in the sense that Dieter's readiness to conform, despite the fact that his sexuality is rejected by the system, has the effect of emphasising further the difficulty of extricating oneself from the role models and standards imposed by society and of living independently.

Gleich neben Afrika, on the contrary, is much more experimental, and the manner in which lesbianism is presented here tends to reflect the post-1989 mood characteristic of the novel as a whole. In fact, as opposed to *Ungelegener Befund*, in which the theme of homosexuality serves to criticise the pressure to conform exercised by the SED regime, the decision to deal with lesbianism in *Gleich neben Afrika* is rather a response to the new opportunities opened up by the disappearance of censorship. It therefore represents a clear example of Königsdorf's desire to experiment with alternative lifestyles and dimensions of self-development to which she did not have access before 1989. In order to understand better why *Gleich neben Afrika* is not in line with other works written by Königsdorf or other authors on this theme, I will briefly comment on the GDR's cultural approach to lesbianism before analysing the love story outlined in this novel.

1.8.1 Hints at Lesbianism: The Example of GDR Women Writers

Despite the readiness of GDR women authors to analyse their system critically, the fact that it effectively imposed the choice of heterosexuality on its citizens and outlawed other forms of sexual behaviour was hardly ever challenged, even in the domain of literature. This is not to say that the theme of lesbianism does not feature at all in the landscape of GDR

literature. It however only plays a very marginal part and is introduced mainly as a means of challenging the institution of marriage. It is presented almost as an utopian alternative to the traditional family lifestyle, which was proving very unsuccessful in the GDR. One could perhaps see the first references to lesbianism as a reaction to the fundamental social malaise afflicting the GDR, that of the breakdown of the majority of marriages.⁸⁶ Lesbianism appears then as one of the many possibilities beyond marriage, now seen as dated, to be considered alongside other alternative lifestyles, such as the one adopted by the many women who decided to become single parents. Therefore, we are very far from the radicalism present in the discussion of lesbianism as promoted by the feminist activists in the 1970s in the West.

I will support my argument by presenting an example which illustrates how lesbianism was portrayed by East German women writers. For instance, in the short story 'Ich habe wieder geheiratet' by Christine Wolter,⁸⁷ lesbianism is hinted at - after the breakdown of their marriages, two women decide to live together. However, their decision is a reaction to the role they had to take on within traditional family life. Attention is drawn to their experiences as married women, who ended up worn out by their attempt to combine their career with bringing up the children, for which they were ultimately solely responsible. Hence, the solidarity and the support which can exist between two women is contrasted with the recurring lack of understanding shown by husbands towards their wives. Thus, the choice made by the two female characters in this short text to live together is far from being a rejection of heterosexuality, but rather caused by their dissatisfaction with married life. As they are both working

⁸⁶ See note 49 above.

⁸⁷ This story is part of the collection *Wie ich meine Unschuld verlor* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1976), 26-35. It is also discussed by Georgina Paul in her article 'Über Verschwiegenges sprechen', 231.

mothers, they can perfectly understand each other's needs and create an atmosphere of harmony within their household.

The courage to reject heterosexuality completely and declare oneself homosexual is a feature that is absent not only from fictional literature, but from documentary literature as well. As it is indicative of the cultural and ideological framework of the GDR with regard to homosexuality, I believe it is important to mention again Maxie Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, in which she gives a first opportunity to a range of women to speak freely about their lives. In one of the interviews,⁸⁸ a woman hints at having had sexual experiences with a girlfriend, but she quickly passes over this episode and concentrates on talking about her relationships with men, almost as an attempt to normalise her situation. This example seems to me to show the extent to which it was difficult in the GDR for homosexuals to identify themselves as such in the first place, let alone to start feeling comfortable in their own skin.

1.8.2 The Lesbian Strand in *Gleich neben Afrika*

Needless to say, lesbians as well as other previously persecuted groups benefited greatly from the openness brought about by the 'peaceful Revolution'. As the debate on homosexuality finally became public, as shown by the various articles which were published on the theme as well as by the emergence of journals aimed at a homosexual readership, they no longer needed to hide. This desire to explore previously prohibited topics such as lesbianism was reflected also in the sphere of literature not only by Königsdorf, but also by other authors such as Gabriele Kachold and Kerstin Gutsche.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ See Barbara F., in Wander, M., *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, 48-57.

⁸⁹ Gabriele Stötzer-Kachold published a volume of prose/poetry *Zügel los* in late 1989, while Kerstin Gutsche published a volume of interviews with lesbians in 1991 following the example of Maxie Wander. This bears the title *Ich ahnungsloser Engel: Lesbenprotokolle*.

Gleich neben Afrika tells the story of a writer who, after unification, is trying to find her own identity in the changed atmosphere of her country. The question of identity in the post-1989 period can be seen as the main theme of the novel and is illustrated through the difficulties experienced by Königsdorf's narrator - a writer -, while the issue of lesbianism remains marginal. The narrator's companion in life is Maria, a woman who seems very eager to exploit the new opportunities offered by life in unified Germany - she would like for example to visit India -, but who at the same time is also feeling disorientated.

While readers are introduced to their present situation, what remains in the shadows is the past of these two figures. They both seem to have had heterosexual relationships before meeting each other - the writer for example has children -, and it is not clear whether this is the first time that they have found themselves involved in a homosexual relationship, or how they have decided to start living together. We are only told that, after a first moment of hesitation due to the fact that this is a period in which everybody is suspicious of everybody else, Maria comes back to the narrator who had sent her away, and this time to stay. The narrator does not mention falling in love; it seems much more likely that the two women started the relationship because they found shelter in each other's company from the intimidating new world which suddenly confronted them. At the same time, their decision to remain together could also be seen as a reflection of the mood of the years 1989-90. The writer confesses for example to being unable to imagine all the new possibilities and alternatives open to her, and perhaps the fact of starting a relationship with another woman could be seen as an attempt to explore new territory: 'Was da aber noch war, lag so weit außerhalb meiner Denkmuster, daß ich damals nicht darauf gekommen wäre' (GA, 100).

Gleich neben Afrika offers an extensive focus on both these figures. Throughout the novel, we get to know the two women whose personalities appear to fit in with the (im)balance of power and division of roles typical of any traditional heterosexual relationship. Thus, for instance, the writer comes across as being quite masculine: of the two, she is the breadwinner, the one who is supposed to work and bring the money home, who can concentrate on her chosen career. The writer is also the rational one, the one who administers their finances and has a more realistic idea of the world and how it works. Maria, on the contrary, is impulsive and capricious. She wants to go to India, but relies almost completely on the writer to earn the money which will pay for the journey. The only action she undertakes to finance her dream is to buy a merry-go-around, even though it is made clear that only a very naïve person would have embarked on such a project. She is also the one who is not ambitious, but supportive of the ambitions of her companion in whom she has a lot of confidence. The imbalance between the two characters is further illustrated by the fact that the writer is constantly lying to Maria when questioned about the progress of the novel she is trying to write. It is almost as if the writer does not want to show her weaknesses to her partner and hides her difficulties in order to protect her and prevent her from worrying:

Maria hatte von Freiheit geträumt. Und nun merkte sie plötzlich, daß es eine Freiheit war, die etwas kostete. Und daß sie den Preis nicht bezahlen konnte. Ich brachte es nicht über das Herz, der reitende Bote mit der schlechten Nachricht zu sein. (GA, 32)

While I tried to show in my discussion of pre-1989 GDR literature, using the example provided by the short story 'Ich habe wieder geheiratet', that the relationship between the two mothers worked precisely because the two were able to collaborate and be equal in their partnership, here it seems that we are faced by two characters who are together because they complement each other. Thus, the ambition, the independence and the strength of one of them are counterbalanced by the lack of ambition, the dependence and the

weakness of the other. This feature of the relationship perpetuates from a certain point of view the traditional image of heterosexual partnerships working on the principle that one of the two, that is the woman, has to be passive in order to give the other, normally the man, a chance to fulfil himself.

The reality of the GDR, with one of the highest divorce rates in the world, showed that when both partners are pursuing self-realisation, their quest leads to a conflict of interests between the two which in most of the cases is resolved through divorce. It is not by chance that most of the divorce proceedings in the GDR were initiated by women, who often felt they could not pursue their goals because of the burden of having to combine career and family. This is also the reason why in the 1970s and 1980s many women writers, such as Christa Wolf,⁹⁰ tried through creative writing to find alternatives in which the woman could seek self-fulfilment. By basing the relationship between Maria and the writer on old stereotypes, Königsdorf does not succeed in adding anything new to the discourse on heterosexual relationships, nor does she offer any significant insights into the dynamics of homosexual partnerships.

Perhaps the most surprising characteristic with regard to the relationship of Maria and the writer is the fact that their homosexuality is not presented as a radical choice, fundamental to the identity and the personal development of the two characters. It seems rather an experiment, as demonstrated by the fact that they do not live their homosexuality as a rejection of heterosexual society, but rather as a temporary alternative. For example, we hear the writer saying: 'Mein Gott! Wie hatte ich es bloß so lange ohne Mann ausgehalten' (GA, 74). Furthermore, when she is visiting

⁹⁰ Wolf concludes her work *Kassandra* with the image of a utopian community, the 'Ida-Berg Gemeinschaft', in which women and a few men live peacefully, without hierarchy and private property, far from the violence of patriarchal society represented by Troy and its war. See Wolf, C., *Kassandra* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1995), first published in 1983.

her hometown, she meets a man and arranges to have dinner with him. The reason for her wanting to do so is the tiredness she is experiencing in her role of the independent woman who can look after herself. After making his acquaintance, she starts dreaming of a little house where they could live happily together, with her cooking dumplings while he is chopping wood in the courtyard. She is very much aware that the attraction she feels towards this man, whom she even defines as a 'Märchenprinz' (GA, 73), derives from the passivity of the role she could take on with him.⁹¹ She in fact says with regard to a possible relationship between the two of them: 'Aber das beste war der Gedanke, nie mehr schreiben zu müssen' (GA, 74). The same kind of desire to be able to rely on a man is quite obviously not felt by Maria, as she is already living a traditional passive role within her homosexual relationship.

Stereotypes are however not only present in the personal traits and behaviour of the two women. Even though, as I have already anticipated, the relationship between the two women remains marginal, and therefore lesbianism is not made into an issue, Königsdorf still does not manage to avoid some of the assumptions surrounding the idea of love between women. The way in which she deals with it should have granted her more freedom to get rid of some of the clichés contained in the novel which emerge especially in her description of the love scenes. In fact, Königsdorf tends to ignore the sexual drive of the physical relationship between two women, by deciding to focus on the tender as opposed to the erotic aspect of it: 'Ich mußte sie die ganze Nacht streicheln. Die Liebe zwischen Frauen besteht im wesentlichen aus Zärtlichkeit und Eifersucht' (GA, 20).

One of the devices employed by Königsdorf to avoid turning lesbianism into an issue is the matter-of-fact style with which she tells the

⁹¹ The longing for a 'Märchenprinz' reflects Königsdorf's personal experience of when she was a young girl, according to what she says in *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, 119.

story of the love between the writer and Maria. This has the effect of depoliticising homosexuality by rendering it as just one among many examples of human behaviour. In this way, Königsdorf is adhering to the view of the new function of literature which she expressed in her collection of essays *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*.⁹² I am referring to the fact that Königsdorf saw the 'peaceful Revolution' as the right time for literature to cast off the *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion*⁹³ which it had taken on during the GDR era as a consequence of the mass media being constantly under the heavy control of state censorship.⁹⁴

However, Königsdorf's decision to treat homosexuality with neutrality, disregarding the fact that it still remains largely taboo, also confers an utopian dimension to the novel. The ease with which these two women live their relationship, added to the general acceptance of their choice shown by people who know them, is so far from reality that it can only be described as utopian. This is especially true if one considers the very religious and provincial backwater in Thuringia where the writer goes to spend some time in the hope of being able to re-define her identity, and where no reactions of disapproval or even of surprise at her relationship with Maria are reported in the novel.

Even though I see Königsdorf's decision to deal with the theme of lesbianism without regard to its political dimension as one of the strengths of *Gleich neben Afrika*, I nevertheless feel that it is also a factor which

⁹² 'Mit ihrer Sensibilität [der Literatur] für Erscheinungen kann sie auf alle Probleme der Welt sehr schnell reagieren. Sie kann also vorpreschen und unbequem sein. Wird sie aber als Vorhut allein gelassen, wird ihr gar alles mögliche angetragen, was ihre Sache nicht ist, gerät sie leicht in zwielichtige Situationen' (MS, 78-79).

⁹³ As explained in note 37 of the Introduction, the term *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion* refers to the function of replacing journalism which literature took over in the GDR where a critical press did not exist.

⁹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Königsdorf's treatment of the *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion* of literature, see section 5.3.1.1. Here I argue that although the depoliticisation of lesbianism is an example of her belief that after 1989 literature was free from the role of having to replace the public sphere, her increasing mistrust of the ability of the media to discuss uncomfortable issues makes her go back to it. As a result, works such as *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* still present traces of this function.

undermines the sense of coherence of the novel as a whole. The writer's identity crisis is in many respects all-embracing. However, while she analyses both the past, going back as far as considering the impact of Fascism on her family, and the present, trying to come to terms with the political earthquake which has shaken the foundations of her life, she does not stop for one moment to consider her sexuality. Even if one sees her relationship with Maria as an experiment, one nevertheless has to admit that entering a homosexual relationship, especially for somebody with an heterosexual background, represents quite a radical change of perspective. Yet, despite the fact that the writer herself seems to be confused as she swings between wanting to be with Maria and her desire to be with a man, this is not one of the elements which determine her identity crisis.

This lack of coherence assumes a further dimension if one takes into account the fact that the crisis suffered by the writer also involves her political choices. Her journey back to her home region offers her the opportunity to re-examine her earlier political education as well as her decision to adopt the socialist ideal as one worth fighting for and on which she could base her life. Even supposing that she engages in a lesbian relationship only after unification, what comes as a surprise is the fact that in her re-assessment of her political identity she never sees her choice to share her life with a woman as contradicting the beliefs of the Party of which she was a member, even if the SED strongly rejected any sexual tendency other than heterosexuality. By contrast, in her process of re-appraisal, her political identity remains isolated from her sexual identity: while the first is part of her past, the latter concerns her present. This creates the impression that the writer's profile is little coherent: while on the one hand we are presented with the experimental energy of a character embarking on a lesbian relationship, on the other hand we are confronted

with the victim of a repressive education, who ended up becoming a conformist because she never learnt how to express herself.⁹⁵

This contradiction was credible in *Ungelegener Befund* because it was a source of distress for Dieter Jhanz, who did not have the courage to live his homosexuality in the open. In *Gleich neben Afrika*, however, the ease with which the writer accepts her homosexual identity does not seem to fit in with the attitude and way of thinking of somebody who, like her, conformed to the system. On the contrary, it appears almost as if Königsdorf had decided to add it to the identity of her protagonist at the very last minute, without having any direct or indirect experience of it. Consequently, the protagonist comes across as a very deep and at the same time shallow and superficial character, depending on which identity she is assuming at any given time. Because of the extremes contained within the same fictional figure, the writer/narrator loses her moral strength and her credibility.

There is another aspect of *Gleich neben Afrika* which shows how Königsdorf is running the risk of losing credibility, that is the utopian dimension of the novel originating from the naturalness with which she introduces the relationship between the writer and Maria. If on the one hand I drew attention to the depoliticisation of homosexuality as one of the strengths of this work, on the other hand it should not be forgotten that the novel is highly autobiographically based.⁹⁶ As a consequence, it seems to me very important that Königsdorf stays credible, in a work in which she is honestly trying to understand what has happened to her generation as well as to her country in general, and to reconstruct an identity for herself. The introduction of homosexuality as an utopian dimension to the novel

⁹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of her education, see section 3.3.4.2.

⁹⁶ Similarly to the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika*, following the events of 1989-90 Königsdorf too goes through an identity crisis which she tries to solve by going back to Thuringia, the region where she also comes. I discuss this point in section 4.3.1.

confuses these issues and weakens the authentic sense of the crisis lived by many people - including Königsdorf - in the former GDR which is so well re-created elsewhere in the pages of this novel. In the end, the reader has the impression that Königsdorf is the writer whenever the focus is on life after 1989 or on the political analysis of change, while she reverts to being a purely fictional character when the novel assumes the tones of a thriller or focuses on the homosexual love story.

A last point to be made with regard to *Gleich neben Afrika* is perhaps the question concerning the relationship between Königsdorf as a committed writer, a term she has often used to describe herself, and her decision to present a highly controversial topic such as homosexuality in a matter-of-fact way. As she has often stressed the role of intellectuals as promoters of a critical culture, the fact that she disregards the taboo nature of homosexuality raises for us the question as to what is the most effective way to fight a taboo in a work of fiction. Instead of underlining the discriminatory attitude shown towards homosexual relationships, and transforming her characters into potential victims of the social order, she lets them live their love like any other. It can perhaps be argued that by doing so Königsdorf employs an original approach to the task of acting as an advocate of critical culture. Rather than losing herself in lengthy discussion of lesbianism, she sets an example of tolerance and open-mindedness for her readers to emulate. Georgina Paul welcomed *Gleich neben Afrika* as a work marking progress towards overcoming the inarticulacy of lesbian literature precisely because of Königsdorf's choice not to turn lesbianism into a (political) issue.⁹⁷

1.9 Conclusion

One of the main strengths of Königsdorf's pre-1989 women-centred works is the fact that they are all based on her personal experience as a woman and

⁹⁷ See Paul, G., 'Über Verschwiegene sprechen', 226-237.

therefore come across as very authentic. This had the effect that the women's literature produced in the GDR was very much appreciated also in the West, not just because it was a source of information on women's emancipation on the other side of the German-German border, but chiefly 'weil sich die Lesenden darin mit ihren Nöten und Wünschen wiederfanden und weil darin menschliche Möglichkeiten, vor allem die von Frauen, so schön und anziehend ins Bild gesetzt, beziehungsweise ahnbar wurden'.⁹⁸

The short stories as snapshots of real life, enabling Königsdorf to focus on one single aspect of life at a time, seem almost to converge in the novel *Respektloser Umgang*, which re-addresses many of the issues previously introduced. It is then clear that the underlying message of these pre-1989 works, including *Ungelegener Befund*, is very similar, as they all promote the right to express one's own individuality. This theme will be further discussed in the following chapter with the analysis of Königsdorf's writings focusing on science, which overall stress the importance of the individual's possibility to develop his/her creative potential.

However, not just the pre-1989 works are related. There is in fact one main aspect which links all the works mentioned in this chapter. They are all implicit protests against the rigid character of patriarchal societies, in which not just women, but men too find it difficult to achieve self-fulfilment. In particular, the fact that *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, written as late as 1997, is a further example drawing attention to the limits imposed on the individual by a patriarchal structure clearly indicates that while in 1989-90 significant political transformations might have occurred, in terms of women's emancipation no radical changes are to be observed. In fact, even though Frau Schrader succeeds in the end, it is mainly because

⁹⁸ Kaufmann, E., 'Adieu Cassandra? Schriftstellerinnen aus der DDR vor, in und nach der Wende', 225.

of her courage and strength in reacting to her situation, not because society offers her a chance to reintegrate herself.

With the publication of *Gleich neben Afrika* in 1992 Königsdorf showed the courage to explore a completely new terrain such as that of lesbianism. However, because of the lack of coherence displayed by the protagonist of this novel, who, in a time of profound self-questioning, analyses all the elements of her identity apart from the homosexual one, Königsdorf's approach to the theme of lesbianism can appear as lightweight. From this perspective, her decision to place a homosexual love story in the background of a book in which the focus is on coming to terms with life after unification arouses the suspicion that the author is just as concerned as her protagonist about the difficulty of finding a publisher in the aftermath of unification⁹⁹ - and thus decides to include an element such as lesbianism which provokes curiosity and distracts attention from the political discussion, so as to make her work more marketable. This suspicion is furthermore increased by the fact that in 1990 Königsdorf resigned from her job at the Academy of Sciences to become a freelance writer, and therefore was entering a period of great financial uncertainty.

The fact that Königsdorf makes her protagonist confess that she is at a loss regarding the subject matter for her novel intensifies our suspicion. The protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* would like to write about life,¹⁰⁰ but she is aware that the readership is tired of being pushed into self-questioning and does not want to hear any more about identity crises and the like;¹⁰¹ from Maria comes the advice that people would like to read

⁹⁹ 'Ich hatte sämtliche Zeitungen, von der Prawda bis zur Frankfurter Allgemeinen, mit Artikeln beglückt. Jetzt druckte mich nicht einmal mehr das Neue Deutschland, weil die Leser meine Artikel satt hatten. Aber auch weil die Redakteure Angst hatten, sich mit mir in die Nesseln zu setzen' (GA, 15-16). I make this point also in section 5.3.1.1.

¹⁰⁰ 'Der Roman, um den es mir eigentlich ging, war das Leben. Aber das behielt ich sorgsam für mich' (GA, 13).

¹⁰¹ 'Aber nicht einmal die Sintflut interessierte noch irgend jemanden. Die Leute hatten andere Sorgen' (GA, 16).

‘etwas Schönes. Ein bißchen Liebe. Oder so’ (GA, 96). As the novel reflects Königsdorf’s experience after unification, the parallel between fictional and real writer is constantly evident, thus making us think that perhaps the introduction of the love story is nothing more than a device to mask the predominant theme of the novel and make it more acceptable and enjoyable. If this is accepted, on the one hand it would emphasize the creative crisis which Königsdorf was undergoing in the early 1990s, but on the other hand it would also underline her lightweight treatment of a still little discussed topic such as lesbianism.

Chapter Two

Helga Königsdorf's Identity as a Scientist

2.1 Introduction

Helga Königsdorf's own statement: 'Die Schriftstellerin, die ich bin, wäre ohne die Wissenschaftlerin nicht denkbar',¹ clearly indicates the impact of her scientific background on her literary identity. Many elements of Königsdorf's work demonstrate that her scientific and literary identities are intertwined. Not only does Königsdorf borrow characters and situations from the scientific environment, but also her ideas and concerns have been heavily influenced by her career as a scientist.

Despite the fact that Königsdorf's scientific perspective is reflected by her work more or less uniformly throughout her career, I nevertheless believe that it is important to distinguish two main phases within her identity as a scientist. The first phase started in 1978, when Königsdorf published her first literary work, *Meine ungehörigen Träume*, after having worked several years first as a physicist and then as a mathematician. This was then the beginning of her writing career, although her main occupation remained until 1990 that of mathematician at the Academy of Sciences. Even if in these years she became increasingly active within the literary scene of the GDR,² she could only dedicate herself to literature in her spare time, which is one of the reasons why in this period she mainly wrote short stories - and even the two novels, *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*, which appeared in this first phase, are relatively short. Hence, during this time she had two identities, as Helga Bunke, the mathematician and Helga Königsdorf, the writer, which she managed to combine very

¹ Interview with Zimmermann and Fröhlich [see note 3 of Chapter 1].

² A sign of Königsdorf's increasing involvement with the GDR cultural scene is for example the fact that in 1985 she applied for the membership of the Writers' Union.

successfully, even though she admitted that sometimes this gave her 'ein regelrechtes Umschaltgefühl'.³

From her very first work, it is apparent that her style of writing and her language have been heavily influenced by her profession as a mathematician. Her language is laconic, precise, and clear, even when describing feelings and moods. Her sentences are short, sometimes they contain only nouns and no verbs. After the publication of *Meine ungehörigen Träume*, Königsdorf herself seemed almost surprised by her own style which she defined as 'ungeschminkt' (MT, 133).

Throughout this phase Königsdorf's scientific background also had a strong thematic impact on her fictional work; most of her stories⁴ deal in fact with the scientific environment of the GDR, and most of her protagonists are scientists. This is also true of *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*, in which Königsdorf focuses on issues related to science. In particular, she concentrates on the scientist's responsibility for the consequences that scientific discoveries might have on society, a theme which she analyses by drawing a parallel between the experience of scientists who lived during the Second World War and that of scientists facing the pressures of the Cold War.

These two novels need further attention because they also show that Königsdorf's reasons for turning to literature were becoming much deeper than a simple desire to express herself in a language different than the one used within mathematics. While during the first years of her literary career writing helped her to express those feelings and emotions which the

³ 'Meine ungehörigen Träume', interview with Frink, G. and Stückrath J., *Diskussion Deutsch*, 03.1995, 62-69 (here 63).

⁴ The short stories discussed here are: 'Lemma I', 15-26, 'Krise', 46-54 and 'Eine Idee und ich', 77-87 from MT; 'Der unangemessene Aufstand des Zahlgraphen Karl-Egon Kuller', 51-67, 'Eine kollektive Leistung', 105-110 and 'Autodidakten', 159-179 from LD; 'Kugelblitz', 5-32 and 'Polymax', 116-125 from LV.

discipline involved in mathematics had forced her to repress, in these works she discovers that she can now combine her experience as a scientist and her skills as a writer in order to raise awareness about social and political issues.

1990 was the year in which her double existence as scientist and writer came to an end: after receiving emeritus status from the Academy of Sciences she started dedicating herself full-time to writing. Although the influence that her scientific background had on her writings right from her first publication remained unaltered, what is new in this second phase is that she started expressing her ideas on science and scientific developments through non-fictional genres. This is exemplified by some of the essays collected under the title *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, the themes of which are in many instances Königsdorf's reflections on science and the role that it should play in modern society. Here, it becomes clear that her ideas are deeply rooted in her experience as she even re-examines some of the problems related to the development of scientific research to which she had already drawn attention in her pre-1989 fictional works. Therefore, one can easily see that her identity as a scientist is one of the strongest elements of continuity between her pre- and post-1989 works.

This is confirmed by the fact that in her post-unification fictional works as well Königsdorf's scientific background continues to play a role by providing her with characters and situations. In the novels *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, for instance, she concentrates in particular on how mathematicians develop their personality and relate to others. What is interesting in this respect is the fact that Königsdorf seems to have evolved over time the conviction that mathematics does in many cases lead to mental instability. Its rationality and abstractness can have the consequence of making the individual unable to communicate with the real world. In this light, it seems almost as if

through the portrayal of characters such as Alice in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* or Thomas in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, who both undergo a nervous breakdown, Königsdorf is imagining what could have happened to her, had she not found in literature a way to overcome these communication problems.

2.2 The First Phase: Königsdorf's Evolution from Full-Time Scientist to Full-Time Writer (from 1978 to 1990)

2.2.1 *Meine ungehörigen Träume* and *Der Lauf der Dinge*: Writing as a 'Befreiung vom streng Rationalen'

The fact that at the age of forty Königsdorf started writing represented for her, as she herself explained, 'eine Befreiung vom streng Rationalen',⁵ 'eine zweite Geburt'.⁶ After a long career as a mathematician, the liberation consisted of getting rid of the disciplined and rational way of thinking and of expressing oneself imposed by mathematics, which she felt was preventing her from developing the various aspects of her individuality.⁷ The long time spent dealing with mathematical formulas made her realise that she was becoming unable to communicate, as a result of her feeling that she was living 'in einem anderen logischen System [...] als normale Leute'.⁸ The frustration related to her difficulty in communicating and in expressing her whole personality is what she defines as *Einengung*⁹ - feeling hemmed in. In the 'Nachsatz' to *Meine ungehörigen Träume* she describes the process which led her into writing as almost unintentional, as

⁵ 'Diskussion nach der Lesung von Helga Königsdorf', Chiarlioni, A. et al. (eds), *Die Literatur der DDR 1976-1986* [see note 28 of Chapter 1], 453.

⁶ Interview with Gaus [see note 56 of Chapter 1], 91.

⁷ 'Mathematik ist eine Wissenschaft, die sehr viel rationale Disziplin erfordert, in der man sich also reduzieren muß und zugleich allgemeine Probleme des Lebens auf die Dauer doch stärker ausklammert. Vielleicht war es dieses Gefühl, darüber einige Dinge vernachlässigt zu haben, das mich wieder zum Schreiben brachte', interview with Köbernick [see note 28 of Chapter 1], 9.

⁸ Interview with Frink and Stückrath [see note 3 above], 63. She makes a very similar point in the interview with Zimmermann and Fröhlich, in which she says about the beginning of her writing career: 'Ich erinnere mich, daß ich in jener Zeit das Gefühl hatte, mir ginge die normale Kommunikationsfähigkeit allmählich verloren'.

⁹ Ibid., 10 and the interview with Gaus, 91, in which she states that writing 'war eine Befreiung aus einer Einengung. Denn die Mathematik bedeutet natürlich auch eine Einengung'. See also how this feeling of *Einengung* influenced her identity as a woman writer in section 1.3.1.

if the desire to write had been trapped inside herself and finally found an outlet: 'Als ich mein altes Vorhaben längst endgültig vergessen hatte, brachen die vorliegenden Geschichten völlig ungerufen aus mir heraus' (MT, 133).

In the 'Nachsatz' it also becomes clear that for Königsdorf writing was a desire which she had repressed since her childhood and which at a certain point in her life could no longer be ignored. Various events in her youth diverted her from a career in the field of literature. First, the fact that at the age of sixteen her first attempt at writing was ridiculed made her focus on other things and forget about her potential as a writer. Later, after the *Abitur* (equivalent to 'A' levels), she wanted to read German Studies (*Germanistik*), but given the high number of applicants for this faculty and the fact that she came from a family of wealthy farmers, she had no chance to do so. Her only way to attend university was to choose something unusual. She therefore went for physics since the quota of girls who attended this course was rather low and consequently they were needed to redress the gender ratio.¹⁰

Even if she found the courage to resume her prematurely abandoned writing career, for many years Königsdorf's main occupation remained that of mathematician. Her two activities became nevertheless complementary as it was her working environment which provided her with settings and characters. Most of her first stories are in fact located in the scientific world, which means that through literature she could criticise the behaviour of scientists, including herself, and the mechanisms regulating the scientific environment of the GDR. As she observed in this regard: 'Nachträglich gesehen ist in meinen Texten das kritische Ich immer zugleich auch

¹⁰ See the interview with Frink and Stückrath, 63 and section 4.2.2, in which I discuss the fact that for Königsdorf the fact that she comes from a family of wealthy farmers has always been a source of shame.

kritisiertes Ich'.¹¹ In other words, through literature she found a means of assessing herself as a scientist and gaining another perspective on the environment she belonged to. By tackling various problems afflicting the sphere of science in the GDR in her fictional works, often in a very ironical way, she managed to put some distance between herself and an otherwise familiar environment. By moving away from it through the assumption of a new identity, that of the writer, it was suddenly easier for her to see the absurdities and the false mechanisms hindering the development of scientific research. Thanks to the new space that her identity as a writer granted her, she could deal ironically with problems which were also part of her daily reality, without running the risk of sounding patronising. At the same time, since the problems are presented from a fictional point of view, she could choose to highlight their absurd and ridiculous aspects, so as to make others aware of the need to act upon them.

Despite the fact that Königsdorf's criticism of the scientific establishment is clearly constructive, her decision to write about it was not welcomed by some of her colleagues, who started seeing her as a denigrator of their institute ('Nestbeschmutzerin').¹² Although she playfully tries to mask the specific departments she is referring to in her texts by giving them names such as 'Genautik' or 'Kübernautik', after the publication of her first collection of short stories she experienced hostility in her working environment. Determined not to let this intolerant attitude stop her, she introduced her second collection of short stories, *Der Lauf der Dinge*, with the ironic sentence: 'Wer Ähnlichkeiten findet, muß Gründe haben'. Furthermore, in her story 'Meine zentnerschweren Träume'¹³ she continued to challenge the hostility of some of her colleagues by describing a dream in which she is lying on an operation table. She is not surrounded by doctors, but by her colleagues who are thinking of getting rid of her for having

¹¹ Ibid., 63.

¹² Ibid., 64. See also the interview with Zimmermann and Fröhlich.

¹³ This story is part of LD, 111-120.

threatened their tranquil existence. In the end, as none of them seems to speak in her favour, she openly asks: 'Wäre es möglich, daß niemand hier Mitleid mit mir hat?' (LD, 114), which clearly sounds like a plea for support.

Given the often sarcastic tone of Königsdorf's stories from *Meine ungehörigen Träume* and *Der Lauf der Dinge* in which she attacks inefficiency, laziness and superficiality of the scientific establishment, it does not come as a surprise that some people might have felt disturbed by them. Here, the irony is sometimes achieved by placing very naïve individuals within a scientific research institute and seeing how they come to terms with it. Most of the time, their naiveté ends up highlighting the opportunism and the shallowness of the environment. Through Johanna, for instance, the ingenuous and passionate student in 'Lemma I', Königsdorf manages to illustrate the effect which the inflated language commonly used by the scientists in the upper echelons of the establishment might have on naïve people. Thus, Johanna is the only one taking the director's speech on the importance of risk-taking in the context of scientific research very seriously, while her colleagues, who have more experience within the environment, have long since learned how to recognise a speech in which words do not carry any real meaning.

Her naiveté is also what brings her to protest against the fact that her failed attempt to solve a famous mathematical problem, 'das dritte Kurzsche Problem',¹⁴ had not been honestly described in the annual report. As she is an enthusiastic young socialist, she does not realise that it is partly

¹⁴ The 'dritte Kurzsche Problem' is a recurrent theme in Königsdorf's works. It appears for the first time in 'Lemma I', and is also mentioned in 'Autodidakten', in which the scientist Dr. Margarete Tatenbruch, in the attempt to fight against her loss of creativity, tries to solve this mathematical problem. After unification, the 'dritte Kurzsche Problem' appears twice. First in the novel *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, one of the main protagonists, Alice, is said to have become famous for having found the solution to it. Finally, in Königsdorf's latest novel *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, Thomas also finds the solution to it, but destroys it before publishing it. I deal with this in section 2.3.2.

because of the plan itself, with its impossible demand to achieve extraordinary results all the time, that the people at the top are forced to pretend that failures are in fact half-successes.¹⁵

As one would expect, her superiors in the institute, concerned to keep their privileged position, cannot afford to tolerate Johanna's challenging behaviour and punish her. In order to get rid of her, they declare her unsuited to carry out academic research and assign her to a more practical task, away from the institute. The absurd aspect of this story is that the decision to send her away was meant to be a punishment for Johanna, who, on the contrary, because of her uncorrupted socialist enthusiasm, is not afraid of losing the privileges that an academic career would have granted her, but sees the chance of dedicating herself to something more directly useful to society as very positive.

Another example of a naïve character operating within the scientific environment is A.B. in 'Eine kollektive Leistung', a scientist who has a new and original idea, but because of his over-positive attitude towards the world does not see the opportunism surrounding him. Helped by the fact that A.B. has a bad reputation for never completing anything, one of his shrewd colleagues steals his idea and starts writing a paper based upon it. Even though other scientists have to help in collecting the necessary results, in the end only two names feature on the paper. One of the technicians, for example, without whose contribution the paper would have not been possible, is not even mentioned. In an ironic turn of events, the paper ends up in the hands of an American scientist and his assistant, who update it and publish it in English under their own names. At this point, it no longer makes sense to publish the first version. The story finishes with A.B. reading the article and having the impression that he once had a similar

¹⁵ One of the characters in the story 'Kugelblitz', Friedrich Kummer, comments with regard to the pressure exercised by the plan: 'Wollte man den Papieren trauen, waren wissenschaftliche Weltrekorde abzuhakende Alltäglichkeiten' (LV, 9-10).

idea. His naïve final comment concluding the story reveals Königsdorf's ironic intentions in recounting this episode: 'Wie streng objektiv doch die Entwicklung der Wissenschaft vor sich ging. Eine Idee, für welche die Zeit herangereift sei, breche sich Bahn, unabhängig vom Subjektiven' (LD, 110).

In other instances the proportions of the indifference and corruption present within the scientific environment are presented through characters who know how to operate within it and use their shrewdness to their own advantage. In 'Eine Idee und ich', the protagonist manages to implement his idea of introducing a consultation centre at his institute because he knows exactly how to exploit the system. He is able to outwit his department head and surround himself with supporters in order to win over those colleagues, such as the trade union representative, who never encourage new initiatives. In the end, the idea appears very successful as a consequence of the media taking an interest in it and of other institutes deciding to have their own consultation centre. Despite the protagonist's ability to get his way, the paradoxical aspect of the story is that his idea is not really valid: in a year only six consultations are registered, one of which was based on a misunderstanding and the other five would have taken place anyway.

The superficiality of the environment, the waste of resources and the inability to judge new projects is furthermore illustrated at the end of the story, when it becomes clear that the fact that the centre has proved to be superfluous is irrelevant. The important thing was to get media attention and create the illusion that new ideas were being developed. This was enough for the department head to get promoted and for the protagonist to be given his job. Thus, this cycle of inefficiency where everything seems to happen for the wrong reasons is perpetuated, as the first action undertaken by the new department head is to close the consultation centre.

Another character who knows how to control the mechanisms of the scientific institute is the internationally known scientist Dr. Kuller, the protagonist of 'Der unangemessene Aufstand des Zahlographen Karl-Egon Kuller'. He has advanced to a top position thanks to his ability to operate within the scientific establishment, and because, in every project he undertakes, he is careful not to create problems for himself or his colleagues:

Für die Planung erreichte er genügend Vorlauf, um nur solche Probleme zu konzipieren, deren Lösungen bereits in seinem Schreibtisch lagen. Auf diese Weise kollidierte er nie mit dem System von Forschungsplanung und Abrechnung. (LD, 58)

After having spent a life fulfilling the expectations imposed on him by the 'system', he decides to rebel. However, even somebody like him, who is familiar with the environment, gets shocked by the level of complacency surrounding him, which adds to the ironical aspect of the story. In a formal lecture he presents a theory to his colleagues which makes no sense. To his dismay, none of his colleagues notice the absurdities contained therein because they are not paying any attention, relying on Kuller's good reputation rather than listening to what he is saying. Soon after he dies without having succeeded in being rebellious even once in his life. To emphasise the ironical aspect of the story even further, Königsdorf describes how after his death he is rewarded by having a lecture room and a medal named after him, his bust displayed at the university, and a congress organised in his honour.

While important resources are spent for the wrong reasons or in support of the wrong people, there are scientists deserving to be taken seriously who instead get dismissed. This is the case with Dr. Glors, the protagonist of 'Krise', whose talent is not recognised. The causes for this are apparently the very technical language used by scientists and the fact that the scientists within the institute are all completely immersed in their

own field. This situation seems to have two main consequences: on the one hand, scientists lose their overview of the research field to which they are contributing, and on the other hand communication becomes almost an impossible task. For these reasons, it is very difficult for the department head to monitor the progress of his colleagues and easy for them to dodge their responsibility, especially since he is not even qualified to handle the job: he is in fact a psychologist doing managerial work in the institute of mathematics. Not surprisingly, he does make a mistake in judging Glors. Once he has managed to get rid of him, Glors's talent is recognised by a foreign university, which awards him an honorary degree. Ironically, in the end Glors's old colleagues find themselves having to deal with the embarrassment of having sent away one of their best men.

2.2.2 *Lichtverhältnisse*: between Pessimism and Commitment

A figure similar to Glors is also introduced in the story 'Kugelblitz'. This is part of *Lichtverhältnisse*, Königsdorf's third collection of short stories, which overall presents slightly different characteristics from the first two. These differences become apparent if, for example, we compare the fate of the protagonists of the two stories 'Krise' and 'Kugelblitz'. Although these texts deal with comparable characters, they differ considerably with respect to the degree of pessimism about the possibility of change displayed by Königsdorf.

Among the similarities, for instance, there is the fact that both Glors and Rudolf Knack, the protagonist of 'Kugelblitz', are not appreciated by their colleagues who in the end manage to drive them away from the institute. Another similarity between these two figures is that they are both very committed scientists whose final interest is not their personal glory but scientific progress. However, Knack is the real rebel. While Glors is ready to immerse himself in whichever task he is assigned, not having interests of his own, but conscientiously doing what he is told, Knack is the obstinate

one, who remains faithful to his ideas right until the end. Thus, while they are both misunderstood and underestimated, Knack is also despised because his methods are unconventional, his projects do not take into account the requirements of the plan and his ideas are too ground-breaking, and therefore too risky, to be accepted. Because of the short-sighted *Nützlichkeitsdenken* (RU, 69) which, as portrayed by Königsdorf, characterised the GDR's scientific establishment, Knack is ridiculed by his colleagues who fail to recognise the importance of the work he is carrying out, hindered by the administrative bodies from pursuing his interests and in the end fired. The ironic reason for his dismissal is that he publishes the results of his research without permission. This highlights that what matters here are not so much his achievements, but the fact that he acts against the bureaucratic procedures of the institute.

It is especially the way in which the two characters react to the fact that they are forced to leave their projects which reveals the profound difference between the two of them. While Glors goes to work for another institute and accepts the next project he is assigned, Knack does not let the fact that he is made to leave the institute stop his research. By contrast, he continues his experiments at his own expense in his apartment. The consequence of these two types of behaviour underlines once more one of Königsdorf's main criticisms of GDR society: only by conforming can one be successful. In fact, while Glors, the one who, although he is committed to his profession, is also willing to conform, eventually ends up being honoured and rewarded for his hard work, Knack comes to the end of his life without any recognition. The ironical aspect of Knack's unfortunate's fate, stressing Königsdorf's increased pessimism regarding the development of society, is that his perseverance against the bureaucratic societal order becomes after his death the basis of the heroism now ascribed to him. As his assistant observes: 'Jetzt, da man seiner sicher war, da alles feststand,

würde man ein Denkmal errichten. Jede Zeit braucht ihre Helden, und dieser konnte sein eigenes Bild nicht mehr verderben' (LV, 6-7).

This story is important because it indicates Königsdorf's progressive change of tone compared with the first two collections of short stories. As I pointed out in the case of the short stories on women's issues, Königsdorf becomes increasingly pessimistic regarding the possibility of fulfilling oneself within the system.¹⁶ Thus, if in *Meine ungehörigen Träume* and in some of the stories in *Der Lauf der Dinge* she is provoking laughter by ironically describing characters and situations within the scientific establishment, this laughter progressively becomes one which '[bleibt] meist in der Kehle stecken'.¹⁷ This starts being visible at the end of *Der Lauf der Dinge*, with the story 'Autodidakten', which tells about an aged mathematician, Dr. Margarete Tatenbruch, and the causes of her death. Although her illness is mainly the consequence of her impression that she has spent a lifetime trying to solve abstract mathematical problems of little significance, her gradual exclusion from the scientific institute is another factor which contributes to worsening the crisis leading her to death. The story takes on a sombre tone in particular when it emerges that her exclusion was the result of a deliberate strategy of the director, whom she saw as a friend but whose aim was to maintain his own position.

While I have mentioned Knack's sad fate, probably the story which best illustrates that Königsdorf's warnings have to be taken seriously is the story 'Polymax', in which she shows how the superficiality of the jargon-filled language often used in the GDR could have fatal consequences. In 'Lemma I', Königsdorf had already addressed the dangers related to the use of such language by describing how it cost Johanna the possibility of an academic career. With 'Polymax' she is arguing that it is high time to look

¹⁶ See sections 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5.

¹⁷ Kaufmann, E., 'Von Sach- und anderen Zwängen' [see note 30 of the Introduction], 245.

for a remedy to this practice of glossing over or paraphrasing important issues because the consequences could be much more serious than just the loss of a career opportunity.

Thus, in this story Königsdorf tells of Herr Glück, the chief editor of a scientific magazine, who publishes an article on a new piece of machinery with a medical purpose - called Polymax - and omits the fact that it does not work. When confronted by the author of the article, he resorts to rhetorical sentences with no meaning in order to defend himself:

Mann, begreifen Sie denn überhaupt nicht, worum es eigentlich geht! Doch nicht darum, ob dieses Gerät funktioniert oder nicht. [...] Er redete von Vorbildwirkung. Von Stimulierung der Jugend. Von der Verantwortung des Publizisten. (LV, 123)

Unfortunately, he ends up paying personally for his lack of seriousness and honesty. As he is in hospital and has to undergo a very difficult operation, the doctor, in the attempt to reassure him, informs him that he will be cured with the most modern equipment, including the brand new machine Polymax.

Regarding Königsdorf's change of tone, it is interesting to try and point out the reasons for it. As discussed above, while at the beginning of her career writing seemed a way for Königsdorf to develop her personality by learning how to express herself at one remove from the rationality characterising mathematics, as time went by she started being increasingly concerned about the impact that her works could have on society. In other words, she started to feel a sense of commitment and see a purpose for writing beyond the fulfilment of purely personal needs.

This change is most certainly a consequence of the fact that writing stopped being an experiment for Königsdorf, but is also a repercussion of the political situation of the 1980s. As the nuclear threat became more real

every day and the state of the world more critical, it seemed that there was no longer time to take things lightly. People had to be made aware that they needed as a matter of urgency to assume their own responsibility for the dangers inherent in the contemporary situation. Raising awareness is therefore the task that Königsdorf started ascribing to herself. In particular the two novels *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund* are examples of literature conceived as a means of criticising modern civilisation (*Zivilisationskritik*) as here it is clear that she is using her writing skills in order to criticise the frightening state of the world and make the readership aware of it.¹⁸ Hence, towards the end of the 1980s, writing for Königsdorf was no longer simply a 'Befreiung vom streng Rationalen', but an expression of her commitment to contribute to the well-being of society, as her following statement indicates: 'Schreiben heißt für mich, um ästhetische Formen ringen, die heutiges Weltbewußtsein mitteilbar machen' (MS, 9).

Yet, although at this time she saw a new purpose in her writing, this does not mean that her identity as a writer started prevailing over her identity as a scientist. The two continued to coexist and complement each other throughout her career. This was possible because Königsdorf never regarded mathematics and literature as two different, possibly incompatible, disciplines. The fact that she successfully managed to develop her identity as a writer next to her identity as a scientist derives from the fact that, in her opinion, mathematics and literature are complementary, in the sense that they both should contribute to the promotion of a critical culture. In Königsdorf's words:

¹⁸ I made a similar point in section 1.6 when I explained that *Respektloser Umgang* distinguishes itself from the first collections of short stories because here it becomes evident that Königsdorf wants to influence society through her work. I also pointed out that as opposed to the short stories, especially those in *Lichtverhältnisse*, this novel is much less pessimistic as its final message is full of hope. Here, in fact, Königsdorf does see a way to change things which I will discuss in the next section.

Für mich stehen so weit auseinanderliegende Dinge wie angemessener kritischer Umgang mit Literatur und die Fähigkeit, wissenschaftlich-technische Leistungen kritisch zu durchleuchten, durchaus in tiefem Zusammenhang. Nur wenn das gesamte Spektrum kritischen Denkens entwickelt wird, kann eine Gesellschaft ihr kreatives Potential ausschöpfen.¹⁹

In this context, *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund* need mentioning again as examples of the fact that Königsdorf relies on her experience and her perspective as a scientist to promote a critical culture through literature. Here, her reflections on issues such as responsibility, attitude to life and progress highlight aspects of the situation during the Second World War and the Cold War, which betray her scientific mind. In other words, the fact that she is trained to see things from a scientific point of view enables her to offer a distinctive and original insight into the situations she is examining.

2.2.3 Raising Awareness about the Role of Science and the Scientist in *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*

2.2.3.1 Königsdorf's Re-definition of the Relationship between Man and Science

In order to fulfil her purpose in writing, now consisting of raising awareness about the real situation, Königsdorf starts in *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund* by analysing the relationship between man and science. Her reasons for trying to re-define this relationship are very specific. First of all, it is very important to underline that she was writing during a new phase of the Cold War, and hence during a period in which science was once again in the history of mankind being misused and abused.²⁰ In the 1980s the concern vis-à-vis the nuclear threat and the

¹⁹ See Czechowski, H., 'Laudatio: Heinrich Mann-Preis 1985' [see note 42 of Chapter 1], 162.

²⁰ Another book which deals with similar issues and is for this reason often compared to *Respektloser Umgang* is Christa Wolf's *Störfall*, written in 1987. The latter recounts the day in the life of a woman when the Chernobyl reactor exploded and her brother was undergoing very delicate brain surgery. See Wolf, C., *Störfall: Nachrichten eines Tages* (Darmstadt; Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1987). For a comparison of the two texts see Staszak, H.-J., 'Erzählen globaler Probleme', in Rönisch, S. (ed.), *DDR-Literatur '87 im Gespräch* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1988), 26-57.

ecological disaster emerging from Königsdorf's novels was widespread among intellectuals on both sides of the German-German border. The preoccupation with issues of anti-militarism and environmentalism began dominating the intellectual scene in the East when, in 1978, the government announced the introduction of compulsory military education (*Wehrkundeunterricht*) in the ninth and tenth grades in the schools. Later, this debate also spread to West Germany, after the NATO 'double track decision' to station Pershing and Cruise missiles in response to the Warsaw Pact's stationing of Soviet SS-20s in the East.²¹

In order to re-define the role of science in our society, Königsdorf draws a parallel with the past: the Cold War demonstrated that only a few decades after the experience of the Second World War people had still not learnt how to use science properly. On the contrary, despite the atomic bomb, science was still being exploited in the 1980s as an instrument of power in the hands of the leading countries in order to increase their sphere of influence. For this reason, Königsdorf decided to deal with how two contemporary scientists, a physicist in *Respektloser Umgang* and a biologist working in the field of genetics in *Ungelegener Befund*, try to come to terms with the role that science had played during the Second World War in order to understand how they should approach their task as scientists in the context of the GDR.

Another reason why Königsdorf saw it as necessary to reflect on science and its role is the fact that, in her view, society had turned science into a myth, a panacea for any kind of problem. According to Königsdorf, such a myth could turn out to be very dangerous, as it prevents individuals from becoming aware of the real situation and assuming personal responsibility for changing it. By contrast, it induces them to believe that

²¹ See Torpey, J. C., *Intellectuals, Socialism and Dissent: The East German Opposition and Its Legacy* (London: Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995), 89-90.

they can dismiss social or environmental problems by reassuring them that science will provide the right solutions. Regrettably, this attitude results in a widespread passive acceptance of the situation.

Nevertheless, if on the one hand she criticises society's heavy reliance on the powers of science, on the other hand, in trying to work out a well-balanced relationship to it, she also points out its benefits. Through the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang*, for example, she shows that she would not have lived so long without the help of medicine. Königsdorf's support for scientific development also becomes evident when, again in *Respektloser Umgang*, the main character says in an imaginary conversation with her son - who wants to dedicate himself to physics - that Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not reasons to abandon physics. On the contrary, she seems convinced that, at a point when the world has reached the limits of growth and therefore urgently needs new solutions in order to guarantee our survival, it would be impossible to go on without new scientific discoveries. In Königsdorf's words:

Gefährlich ist der Mythos, wir könnten mit ihrer Hilfe [der Wissenschaft] getrost jede Suppe auslöffeln, die wir uns einbrocken. Das Warten auf Wunder. Aber gefährlicher ist der Glaube, wir kämen ohne neue Erkenntnis aus. (RU, 93)

Therefore, what is at the core of Königsdorf's re-definition of society's relationship to science is the basic understanding that science is essential, but that it must be orientated towards the welfare of mankind - and not just that of the developed countries. The change of the current attitude towards the relationship between science and progress should consist in a transition from quantity to quality, where the basic criterion of scientific development must be the respect for human dignity.²² In order for this to become reality, it is of course necessary that scientists assume responsibility for their

²² See also the discussion of human dignity in section 3.2.2.

research, 'weil es zwischen Verantwortung und Mitschuld in Zukunft nichts mehr gibt' (RU, 94). This is the reason why in *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund* she examines issues of responsibility and resistance, after drawing her conclusions from what happened during the Second World War. Such a parallel seems necessary in order to understand better the present and be prepared for the future.

2.2.3.2 The Importance of Resistance and Responsibility for the Scientist

In order to set in train the discussion about the need for scientists and individuals in general to assume a responsible attitude vis-à-vis their contemporary situation, Königsdorf describes in *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund* two characters - respectively a physicist and a biologist - who are trapped in the present and eventually forced to take stock of their identity as scientists and as individuals. Initially, they come across as completely absorbed by their daily activities, victims of the frenetic rhythm of life imposed on them by society. In other words, they are conformists who have always refused to acknowledge the responsibility involved in their profession or in their life as citizens. Furthermore, they both appear to be completely orientated towards future projects, and almost scared to pause to think for fear of the truths which may emerge about themselves: 'Und das Übermaß an Geschäftigkeit ist nur Tarnung für die Dürre in uns' (UB, 24).

Thus, the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* is described as somebody channelling all her energy towards personal success. Caught in this mechanism when one achievement needs to be followed by an even greater one, she seems to have led a life orientated towards self-fulfilment, blinded by the 'Gier nach den Dingen, nach Macht, nach Ruhm' (RU, 115), while neglecting more important aspects of her life. The sense of failure about her chosen lifestyle, which she develops in the course of the novel, is particularly highlighted when she imagines being judged in a trial by the

‘council of dead’. As she is in front of the assembly, she realises she is surrounded by mirrors, all reflecting her image from different perspectives. It is at this moment that it becomes clear to her that, as she cannot escape from herself, self-analysis can no longer be put off: ‘Gefangen mit meinem eigenen Bild. Gezwungen, mich anzusehen. Wie lange schon habe ich das vermieden’ (RU, 88). The most pressing question with which she is confronted seems to be whether she has committed herself to her work, pursued her goals, sometimes even at the expense of other people, just to satisfy her ego or because she was really convinced that she could contribute to improving society’s well-being: ‘Ging es mir wirklich jemals um den Zustand der Welt, oder immer nur um mich?’ (RU, 89).

The protagonist of *Ungelegener Befund*, Dieter Jhanz, also appears to have never questioned his profession or his life in general. He is surprised when his friend Paul shows reserve regarding the ethics of genetic research and without hesitation says of himself that he is happy about the fact that his work will enable him ‘[sich] in Zukunft auf das Zentrum der Entwicklung hin zu bewegen und nicht auf einem Seitenast zu verkümmern’ (UB, 31). He can assume this complacent attitude regarding his profession because, as he explains in one of his letters to Paul, he feels ‘Abneigung gegen Beurteilungen’ (UB, 31).

This seems to be one of the main characteristics of Dieter’s life as a whole, as he often appears to be unable to take a clear position. The letters he writes are indicative of his inconsistent personality. Some of these are in fact written in a businesslike tone, while others, namely the ones he addresses to Felix but never sends, show a strong homosexual undercurrent. The fact that he lacks the courage to live his homosexuality more openly²³

²³ In section 1.8 I pointed out that homosexuals in the GDR were seriously discriminated against. This is therefore one of the main reasons why Dieter might keep his homosexuality secret. In this section I also discussed how homosexuality is presented in *Ungelegener Befund*, although this is part of a much larger analysis which focuses in particular on the theme of lesbianism in the novel *Gleich neben Afrika*.

ultimately reflects his conformist attitude, his need for conventions and his fear of upsetting the course of things. He is aware of these contradictions within his life, although he has never been able to resolve them:

Die Wahrheit ist, ich gehöre zu den Leuten, die Angst haben, aufzufallen. Die im Strom mitschwimmen und sich verraten fühlen, wenn er nicht mehr trägt. Die sich fürchten, plötzlich allein dazustehen und sich gegen etwas, was auch immer, stellen zu müssen. Nur so ist es möglich, daß ich die vielen Fragen, die auf der Hand lagen, nie ausgesprochen habe. (UB, 99)

What gives these two characters the courage to face important questions about themselves and their profession is that, in different ways, their routine is suddenly disrupted. In *Respektloser Umgang*, the protagonist discovers she is suffering from a wasting disease, the progress of which can be slowed but not stopped by medicine. As the idea of death suddenly changes her perspective on things and the importance she attributes to them, she feels the need to re-examine her past in order to be able to understand the meaning of her life suddenly coming to an end. In the attempt to carry out this difficult task, she imagines making the acquaintance of the late Lise Meitner, the physicist who worked with Otto Hahn on the splitting of the atom until 1938, the year in which she had to flee Germany because of her Jewish origins. The choice of this historical figure is not accidental, given that it provides the link between the atomic bomb of 1945 and the Cold War and exemplifies the need for scientists to be aware of the amount of responsibility involved in their research.

In Dieter's case, what upsets his existence is the finding of a disturbing bundle of letters, revealing the eagerness of their author, who might have been his father, to participate in medical experiments on prisoners of war. The letters are ironically recovered while he is preparing his contribution to a commemorative speech to pay homage to his dead father's commendable work in the provision of therapy and care for mentally handicapped children. This discovery makes it impossible for him to carry on his life undisturbed. The difficult questions the letters pose

cannot be easily dismissed. They mark therefore the beginning of a difficult process of self-deconstruction - very similar to the one undertaken by the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* - in which Dieter finds himself analysing his own actions and inaction on a personal as well as professional level.

The real 'ungelegener Befund' is not so much the discovery made by Dieter that his father might have been a Nazi, rather the similarity between the attitude of the career fascist who wrote the letters and his own. After all, the fact that the father became a Nazi indicates that he too was a 'Mitschwimmer' (UB, 99), who avoided asking himself certain questions. By repeatedly reading the letters, Dieter realises how one could have conformed to Nazism. The more he reads them, the less he is shocked, and he starts seeing how even dreadful things can appear as 'normal', once they become part of our daily life. As he is aware of his 'Abneigung gegen Beurteilungen' (UB, 31), he cannot but accept the link between himself and his father:

Was unterscheidet mich eigentlich von meinem Vater? Die Zeiten sind anders. Das ist viel. Aber es gibt mir kein Recht, mich zu überheben. Auch mein Vater wäre nie auf die Idee gekommen, allgemein Anerkanntes zu hinterfragen. (UB, 99)

Similarly to Dieter, the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* too finds herself facing important questions about her responsibility as a scientist and as an individual while exploring her past. For instance, she tries to analyse her father's behaviour, which makes her aware of how fine is the line dividing passiveness from complicity. He in fact embodies the mentality of 'sich arrangieren' (RU, 38). During the war, he manages to find a space for himself and his family where they can live undisturbed, always careful not to come into conflict with the regime. He feels completely powerless towards the system and is only concerned about pursuing his own interests, even if this means collaborating with a regime which declared his people as

racially inferior - he is half-Jewish. While recalling him, the daughter remembers his refrain: 'Was sollten wir denn tun? Nein. Was konnten wir denn tun? Es hätte doch überhaupt nichts genützt' (RU, 44).

His mentality is also what makes him choose to be politically blind. For example, he continues to believe in the German juridical system even after the promulgation of the Nuremberg Racial Laws, which he welcomes because after all, as he repeats, 'Schlechtes Recht sei besser als gar kein Recht' (RU, 38). As a consequence of having been educated to have respect for his government, he seems to be unable to see through what is really happening - or maybe he just refuses to acknowledge it.²⁴ The protagonist/daughter appears shocked to experience how her father just conformed and resigned himself to the idea of being powerless. However, the question of what could have effectively been done to oppose the system remains unanswered. She finds it difficult to take any position and swings between the conviction that by behaving passively her father made himself an accomplice of the Nazi regime and the belief that he could not have behaved otherwise: 'Der Gedanke an Widerstand gegen die Obrigkeit war in seinem logischen System überhaupt nicht vorgesehen' (RU, 98).

The figure of the father also has the function of emphasising the fact that, if at that time it was important for ordinary citizens to be able to assess their current situation, it was even more important for scientists, given the powerful position in which their research placed them. This is certainly true of Meitner as she was carrying out the experiments on the splitting of the atom which eventually led to the atomic bomb. Yet, despite the political importance of her research, Meitner is presented as one of those politically blind scientists, whose lack of interest in world politics prevented them from correctly assessing the dangers represented by National

²⁴ For a discussion of this point with emphasis on the relationship between the Jewish side of Königsdorf's family and the German state, see section 4.2.2.

Socialism and therefore understanding their responsibility. Despite her vulnerable position as a Jew in Germany during the Third Reich, she comes across as completely unaware of the political situation. The fact that in 1938 she is forced to flee Germany takes her by surprise, she finds it difficult to understand why and feels betrayed by her colleagues. Although her licence to teach is withdrawn in 1933, it is clear that she goes on for years refusing to acknowledge the dangers she is running. Driven by her love for science, nothing other than her research seems to count for her.

While trying to present a clear picture of the events that led to the atomic bomb - even though she does not hide her disappointment that the scientists of that time, including Meitner, were prepared to believe that governments could deploy nuclear fission wisely - the protagonist never assumes a judgmental tone. As in her father's case, the question of what she would have done, had she been in Meitner's shoes, cannot be answered. Nevertheless, Königsdorf does reproach Meitner for having thought that her Austrian nationality was enough to prevent her from getting involved and for having pursued her studies in an ethical vacuum, devoid of humanitarian responsibility. She also cannot avoid speculating that because of Meitner's lack of interest in current affairs, even if she had been in Germany during the final experiments, it is doubtful whether she would have known whom to trust with the result. Although she was the only one in Germany who could have assessed the scientific importance of the discovery, it is almost certain that she would have not been able to judge its political implications. It is therefore evident that through these speculations Königsdorf is underlining the fact that, for a scientist, acting responsibly also means being politically informed.

Only at the end does it become clear that if she provokes Meitner with impertinent questions and investigates the behaviour of her father, it is because she is indirectly looking for solutions to the dilemmas of

complicity and responsibility in her own life. This confrontation with figures from the past is therefore necessary for her in order to accept the responsibility for her own decisions and be prepared for the moment when she is called to answer for her own actions:

[...] die Gesichter von Lise Meitner, von meinem Vater. [...] Sie sind ein Teil von mir. [...] Die Fragen, die ich an sie richte, sind Fragen an mich selbst. [...] Wie soll ich dem Moment gewachsen sein, in dem sich das *Was werde ich...?* unaufhaltsam in ein *Was habe ich...?* wandelt. (RU, 89-90)

By dealing with science in the context of the Second World War, Königsdorf re-introduces the old argument about science for its own sake and the scientist's pursuit of 'pure' research, which disregards the fact that science in many instances cannot be separated from economics and politics. This theme had already been discussed in the works of Brecht, Dürrenmatt and Kipphardt.²⁵ However, Königsdorf does not simply reproduce the debate on the responsibility of physicists from a theoretical point of view through the figure of Lise Meitner, but refers specifically to the historical controversies which surrounded the discovery of nuclear power at the time of the Second World War. As Eva Kaufmann points out: '[sie] verweist in diesem Zusammenhang auf die objektiven Widersprüche, die sich in den Reaktionen von Wissenschaftlern zeigten'.²⁶ For instance, she mentions, among others, Frédéric Joliot-Curie, who in 1935 had warned against the dangers arising from the splitting of the atom, Rutherford, who, on the contrary, in 1937 did not recognise nuclear fission as a source of energy and as potentially dangerous, and Einstein, who in 1939 signed a letter to Roosevelt in which he asked for support for nuclear research to ensure that the USA would be prepared for the German atomic bomb (RU, 67-72).

²⁵ See for example Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Die Physiker* (1962), Bertold Brecht's *Leben des Galilei* (1938-39) and Heinar Kipphardt's *In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1964).

²⁶ Kaufmann, E., 'Haltung nehmen' [see note 30 of the Introduction], 281.

2.2.3.3 Strategies Employed by Königsdorf to Raise Awareness

As mentioned above, the debate on the role of science presented in these two novels is intended to have an impact on Königsdorf's contemporary society by encouraging people to assume a responsible and realistic attitude towards science. Hence, one of the techniques she adopts to make her discussion accessible and relevant to her readership is the introduction of interior monologue in *Respektloser Umgang* and the epistolary form in *Ungelegener Befund*. In addition to enabling her to move from past to present, which creates a sense of continuity, these literary devices also allow her to handle these difficult themes without moral rigidity in order not to discourage the readers from facing the issues emerging from the texts in a personal way. On the contrary, in *Respektloser Umgang* for instance, the interrogatory form, the incorporation of reflections and comments into the narration, the fractured picture of reality are all elements which force the readers to join in the 'respektloser Umgang'. The same can be said for *Ungelegener Befund* which, because of its epistolary form, compels the readers to create their own narrative by making the links between the various letters. The demands these two texts place upon the readers are all the more important if we take into account that the questions asked by Königsdorf do not only concern her fictional characters, but an entire generation.

The readers are made to participate in the novels also by the way in which Königsdorf plays with various possibilities, offers different versions of the same story and leaves both her works open-ended. In this way, she rejects the notion of absolute truth, but constantly challenges one's often oversimplified vision of reality. Thus, even if in order to tell Meitner's story Königsdorf carried out research into the real life of the scientist,²⁷

²⁷ Königsdorf explains how she incorporated parts of Meitner's correspondence word by word into her text. See Königsdorf's interview with Klaus Hammer 'Fiktiver Dialog', *Sonntag*, 24.08.86, in which she says: 'Ich habe mich [...] bei den Fakten an Überliefertes gehalten und zum Teil sogar Wörtliches aus Briefen übernommen'. In note 11 of Chapter 1, I pointed out that Königsdorf started collecting information on the life of Lise Meitner because DEFA had asked her to write a

there is a turning point in the novel when Meitner suggests that things could have been read in a completely different way. The official version - which is also the one known by the narrator - says that Meitner had led the research on the splitting of the atom in a false direction because she misinterpreted the results of the experiments. Towards the end of the novel, Meitner challenges this reading of her story by alluding to the fact that she had immediately recognised the importance of the discovery, but also its danger, and had played it down so as not to provide the Nazis with such a powerful weapon. This version is also credible, and in the end the point made is that what matters is not the truth in itself, but our openness to different perspectives on the same event: 'Sie lehnt sich zurück und sagt: Ist es wirklich so wichtig. Ich meine, ob es den Tatsachen entspricht oder nicht. Ist nicht lediglich von Bedeutung, daß es wahr sein könnte' (RU, 114).

This invitation to consider how it might have been is also present in relation to Dieter's father, since the mere possibility that he might have been the career fascist who wrote the letters, is enough to upset Dieter's life and eventually make him open his eyes. Even if Dieter will never be able to establish whether the author of the letters was really his father, it is not important in terms of the aim of this novel. While *Ungelegener Befund* has been criticised for being too inconclusive,²⁸ I believe that for Königsdorf to solve the mystery would have meant going against what she is trying to demonstrate: as the passing of time does not allow us to establish the truths

film script on the famous scientist. In this context, I also would like to stress the point made by Jeanette Clausen about the fact that in her novel Königsdorf does not instrumentalise the historical figure of Lise Meitner by turning her into a victim of the circumstances or a role model like some of her colleagues, for example Renate Feyl, had already done (see also note 63 of Chapter 1). By contrast, Königsdorf avoids objectifying Meitner by giving her a life of her own which enables her to provoke and challenge the narrator. See Clausen, J., 'Resisting Objectification' [see note 60 of Chapter 1].

²⁸ See Kane, M., 'Helga Königsdorf's "Respektloser Umgang", "Die geschlossenen Türen am Abend: Erzählungen", "Ungelegener Befund" and Helga Schubert's "Judasfrauen: Zehn Fallgeschichten weiblicher Denunziation im Dritten Reich"', *Pen International, Bulletin of Selected Books*, Vol. XL, No. 2, 1990, 15-17 (here 17).

of the past, it is fundamental that we prepare ourselves to confront what might have been true. This is the conclusion drawn by Dieter himself, while imagining the circumstances in which he was conceived:

Ach, es gibt so viele mögliche Anfänge, wie die Phantasie ausreicht. Und sie alle sind Teil einer umfassenden Wahrheit, die nicht mehr durch Reales in Frage gestellt wird, weil nichts mehr auf die einfachen Tatsachen reduzierbar ist. (UB, 16)

Thus, it becomes clear that if Königsdorf is not searching for any absolute truths about the past, her aim in presenting these themes through her fictional characters is to draw lessons that can be applied in her present time. The fact that the discussion on science for its own sake and on responsibility is by no means obsolete is illustrated in *Ungelegener Befund*, in which she shows through the figure of Felix how the younger generation approaches science. The latter is in fact a young biologist who, possibly in the attempt to escape his personal problems, appears to be almost obsessed with his research. This is what ultimately matters to him. In contrast to Dieter, who always felt obliged to behave according to conventions, he refuses any kind of restrictions coming from society and sees himself as the 'Mittelpunkt der Welt' (UB, 103). However, even if his independence is without doubt one of his strengths, the fact that he pursues his research without rules, which, as Dieter points out, would at least confront him with certain moral questions (UB, 103-104), is extremely dangerous. As in Meitner's case, his ambitions could impede him from seeing the tragic repercussions which his work might have.

Apart from the use of the monologue and epistolary forms, in *Respektloser Umgang* Königsdorf introduces another technique, which also has the function of preventing her words from remaining abstract and of involving the readers in the discussion. This consists of provoking fear in order to inspire resistance and foster courage. Analogous to the main character, who only when faced with her illness becomes aware of the

reality of death, and, stimulated by this threat, finds the courage to face her life, so other people should be made aware of the risks they are running. By describing the experience of the protagonist in coping with an illness,²⁹ Königsdorf comes to the understanding that 'Angst aus Wissen' (RU, 94) is by no means paralysing, rather stimulating. Therefore, just as the doctors have the duty to inform their patients of their real condition, so too it is the scientists' responsibility to warn us. In this manner they will act out of respect for human dignity and hopefully provoke 'die Mobilisierung der Humanität' (RU, 94), the final ambitious solution offered by Königsdorf to her readers.

This idea of 'Angst aus Wissen' marks the beginning of the formulation of one of Königsdorf's most recurrent concepts, namely the Cassandra function of literature - 'Kassandra-Funktion'.³⁰ This implies that the author should be a Cassandra who makes the readership aware of their real situation, in order to enable them to act upon it. In Königsdorf's words: 'Nicht die Kassandra, die das Unheil weissagt und keinen Glauben findet, sondern eine Kassandra, die nichts beschönigt und die trotzdem ermutigt, sich gegen das Unheil zu wehren' (MS, 8). As a consequence, the task of the writer is first to inform, subsequently to encourage and mobilise. From this point of view, the writer has a kind of responsibility which is very similar to that of the scientist: they both have a warning function in the sense that by revealing the truth of reality they both provoke fear, which will hopefully turn into the courage to take action. This formulation, which first appeared in the speech she gave at the Tenth Writers' Congress in 1987,³¹ has characterised Königsdorf's literary production throughout her career, and it is the best example of how she has managed to fuse together her literary and scientific identities.

²⁹ This is an autobiographically based element as Königsdorf herself suffers from Parkinson's disease.

³⁰ For a further discussion of the Cassandra function of literature in the context of *Respektloser Umgang* and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, see respectively sections 5.2.4 and 5.5.2.

³¹ See note 5 of the Introduction.

Finally, after engaging in so much provocation, another device employed by Königsdorf to stimulate her readers consists of offering them through the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* an example of how we can engage in resistance. This character can in fact be seen as a paradigm of resistance, for she does not give in to her illness. On the contrary, after considering euthanasia, she manages to put into practice the principle discussed above by turning her fear of dying into a productive fear, and hence into the courage to be active for herself and for others. Following her reflections on whether it would be more dignified to be able to decide about one's own death, she understands that to choose euthanasia would mean going against what she has learnt from her analysis of herself and of the past. As the outcome of her thinking process is that in every situation we should always prioritise human life as the highest value, she has to accept her fate in order to be able to set an example:

Haben wir nicht historische Erfahrung mit der Mißachtung von Leben. Mit der Diskriminierung der Schwachen. Der anderen. Habe ich denn nichts begriffen? Mit allem, was wir tun, setzen wir Zeichen. Auch wenn es anscheinend nur uns selbst, das eigene Leben, betrifft. (RU, 108)

At this stage it is clear that the protagonist is ready to abandon self-centred introspection and accept the 'Auftrag' (RU, 115) that Lise Meitner assigns her. Through the motif of the task Königsdorf gives her main character the possibility, 'sich nicht mehr nur als ausgeliefertes Objekt zu fühlen, sondern in einem kleinen, aber zugleich entscheidenden Maße aktiv zu werden'.³² In this sense the 'task' has a meaning in itself and that is why it is not particularly relevant to know of what it consists.³³ What is important is that her engagement for the future allows her to place herself in a continuum of time. The sense of continuity which she manages to create between past,

³² Kaufmann, E., 'Haltung nehmen', 283.

³³ In section 5.3.2.1, I point out that the reason why Königsdorf never explains of what this task assigned by Meitner actually consists could be seen as her attempt to encourage her readers to attribute to it the meaning that best suits their perception of the world.

present and future is why in the end she draws the conclusion that: 'Der Sinn des Lebens ist das Leben. [...] Unsterblich sind wir, solange diesem Leben Kontinuität beschieden ist' (RU, 116).

2.3 The Second Phase: the Role of Königsdorf's Scientific Background after She Becomes a Full-Time Writer (from 1990 to 1998)

1990 marked the beginning of the second phase of Königsdorf's identity as a scientist as in this year a major change in her personal life took place: she left the Academy of Sciences and became a full-time writer. The considerably larger amount of time now at her disposal was well employed, as not only was Königsdorf one of the most prolific public actors during the period from the 'peaceful Revolution' to unification, but after 1990 she also managed to produce various essays and three novels. Even if the events of 1989-90 and all their implications are the main theme of the works written in this second phase, Königsdorf's scientific background continues to affect her writings from various points of view. As I will discuss in the following sections, it for instance influences Königsdorf's articles, which in 1994 she turned into essays in the collection *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*. These are important because they show that after unification she exploited the opportunity to adopt non-fictional genres to approach themes, such as the role of science within society, which prior to 1989 she could only treat in her fictional works, as a consequence of the SED's control on the mass media.³⁴

With regard to her post-unification novels, it is interesting to note that on the one hand they are similar to her pre-1989 fictional works. For example, some of her protagonists, among them three of the four figures of *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* as well as Thomas Schrader in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, are scientists or are working within the

³⁴ I deal in more detail with issues of censorship and Königsdorf's attitude towards it in section 3.2.1.

scientific environment. On the other hand, however, after 1990, instead of presenting different aspects of science and the scientific establishment as she had done in the short stories and in *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*, she concentrates in particular on mathematicians and seems especially interested in describing the difficulties they have in coping with emotions.

Hence, the change in this second phase mainly consists of the fact that if before 1990 she was inside the science field and occasionally tried to contribute critically to improving our understanding of it by portraying it from a literary perspective, after 1990 she became entirely part of the literary scene, but still tried to exert some influence on the scientific development of our society. In both cases, despite this passage from full-time scientist to full-time writer, the essence of both these identities remains a strong commitment towards the well-being of humanity, and the desire to contribute through both disciplines to the healthy development of the society she is part of.

Although her decision to become a full-time writer does not mean that she rejected her scientific background, it is also true that, especially towards the end of the 1980s, in her non-fictional writings and above all in the essays contained in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*, she started recognising qualities in literature which she could not find in science. Despite the fact that both science and literature are subject to external constraints, and therefore both writers and scientists enjoy a limited degree of freedom,³⁵ literature has nevertheless the advantage of being less

³⁵ This is Königsdorf's list of the constraints limiting the scientist's freedom: 'In Wahrheit wird sein Einfluß [der Einfluß des Fachmannes] auf den Wissenschaftsbetrieb immer geringer. Teamwork, eine wuchernde Bürokratie, außerwissenschaftliche Ziele, Wünsche von Geldgebern, das alles mindert seine Möglichkeit, die Richtung des Forschungsprozesses mitzubestimmen. Von unabhängiger Wissenschaft kann nicht die Rede sein' (RW, 38). As a consequence of the fact that economics and politics dominate many spheres of society, not solely that of scientific research, writers too, especially if dependent on their income to survive, are restricted by the laws of the market economy, in the sense that what they produce needs to be sellable. I discuss Königsdorf's

compartmentalised than science. As a result, it allows writers to offer their vision of today's situation as a whole. This aspect of literature becomes particularly important if we take into account, as Königsdorf often underlines, that the problems afflicting the world in the modern era are of global dimensions and therefore require to be considered in their entirety.

According to Königsdorf, another advantage of literature is the fact that it reveals a variety of subjective points of view. In fact, every time readers approach any piece of writing, they manifest their individuality by reacting to it. Hence, it is not only the way of thinking of the author which is expressed through literature, but also that of the reader. In Königsdorf's words: 'Literatur enthüllt nicht nur das Weltgefühl des Autors, sondern in der Reaktion darauf auch etwas von der Wesensart des Lesers. Literatur ist subjektiv in diesem doppelten Sinn [...]' (MS, 12). Although Königsdorf has always stressed the importance of expressing one's individuality, it is in particular during 1989-90 that she realised that the people of the GDR, including herself, had too often renounced their sense of dignity by conforming to a totalitarian regime.³⁶ Hence, as literature appears to be better suited to stimulate the development of one's own identity, this is another reason why during this time in her life she favoured it.

Not only does literature unveil both the attitude of the writer and that of the readers, it also engages the two sides in a dialogue. In Königsdorf's view, the dynamic nature of literature turns writers into 'Erziehungsobjekte' (MS, 8), as it is through writing, and hence through dialogue with their readers, that they come to understand themselves and their reality better. The transition from subject into object and vice versa allows continuous

attempts to come to terms with being a writer in a market economy in section 5.3.1.1.

³⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Königsdorf's reaction to the events of 1989-90, see section 3.3.2.

confrontation, re-consideration and ultimately improvement of the two sides:

Und nicht zuletzt heißt Schreiben für mich auch, gemeinsam mit dem Leser, 'Ich' sagen. Und 'Ich' sogleich wieder in Frage stellen. Es erneut, auf neue Weise also, mit kollektiver Identität konfrontieren und diese gegebenenfalls auch verändern. (MS, 9)³⁷

It is then clear that the transition from science to literature represents by no means the adoption of a more passive role. On the contrary, by accepting her own status as an 'Erziehungsobjekt' (MS, 8), it is evident that Königsdorf sees literature as a research field. This is exemplified by the fact that in many instances not only does she point to the problems, but also makes suggestions, intended to provoke a discussion on how these might be solved: '[...] ich will mich meinen Zukunftsängsten nicht passiv ausliefern. Die Welt ist unsere Fragen wert' (RW, 15). This is what she does in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, in which she is constantly exploring, debating and discussing in order to find solutions to the precarious situation of the world.

2.3.1 Königsdorf's Non-Fictional Writings on Science

During the earlier days of the 'peaceful Revolution', Königsdorf reflected in detail on the role which science should play within the framework of that reformed society to which many intellectuals hoped to be able to contribute.³⁸ As in the pre-1989 novels, in these writings she puts the emphasis on the fact that scientific developments should be welcomed only when compatible with human dignity and the interests of mankind as a whole.

³⁷ This exchange between readers and writers takes place in particular in Königsdorf's post-unification novels. As she is also disorientated vis-à-vis the new situation, the issues she puts forwards in works such as *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* are as new to her as to anybody else. Although Königsdorf has always favoured a dialogue with the readership, in the post-unification works the exchange appears more honest than in the pre-1989 novels, in which she had time to reflect over the issues she discusses. I discuss this point in section 5.3.2.4.

³⁸ See the text 'Das Prinzip Menschenwürde' (MS, 23-29).

More original are the essays in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*.³⁹ These were written in the years following unification, and therefore illustrate better the evolution of Königsdorf's thought as she was trying to come to terms with the mechanisms regulating life within unified Germany while looking for solutions which might 'save the world'. Here not only does Königsdorf analyse those aspects hindering the development of scientific research, but she also expresses her strong belief that in order to improve the present situation a contribution from the (natural) scientist ('Naturwissenschaftler') is needed. In this case, the irony of the situation cannot go unnoticed. After opting for the literary career, Königsdorf felt that she had to draw attention to the significance of the role that scientists play or rather should play within our society. Perhaps, given that she was no longer part of the Academy of Sciences, she felt freer to praise the figure of the scientist without running the risk of sounding self-important.

2.3.1.1 Königsdorf's Suggestions for a Better Society as Expressed in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*

As she is convinced of the gravity and urgency of the ecological situation, her main concern, as expressed in the introductory poem 'In die Zeit ...', is our society's belief that the world will continue to go on even if we do not change our life style, simply because that has always been the case.⁴⁰ This belief, which Königsdorf defines as the utopia of our time, provides us with the justification not to act, and therefore to deny our responsibility for the ecological disasters and the injustices present in the world in general: 'In dieser Zeit sagten die Leute:/ Es geht schon irgendwie weiter./ Es hat sowieso keinen Zweck' (RW, 5).

³⁹ While here I concentrate on Königsdorf's ideas related to science, in the analysis of these texts which I carry out in section 3.4.2 I focus on other themes such as the concept of collective identity.

⁴⁰ This concept is also presented in the essays 'Der Mut zu stolzen Tönen' (RW 43-47), in which she states: 'Wir leben jetzt mit der gefährlichen, uneingestanden Utopie, daß es ohne unsere bewußte Anstrengung schon irgendwie weitergeht, weil es immer so weitergegangen ist' (RW, 46-47).

The complacency of the widespread conformist attitude in the GDR allowing people to lead a life without taking any responsibility for themselves or their actions had already been ridiculed by Königsdorf many times in the past. An example in this respect is the short story 'Die Ameisenmetamorphose',⁴¹ in which the protagonist wakes up one morning transformed into an ant. Königsdorf's decision to make him into an ant serves to accentuate his personality, marked by a conformist attitude and a devotion to order and duty. He in fact does not take long to feel at ease in his new skin. As in his previous life, he does not waste time complaining, but easily detaches himself from his family and existence as a human being and quickly adapts himself to his new life. Given his conformist tendencies, as the third-person narrator ironically remarks at the end, '[e]r wußte, daß Ameisen in ziemlich geordneten Verhältnissen lebten, und er hatte keine Bange, sich zurechtzufinden' (LV, 135).

According to Königsdorf, the reason why nowadays most people in the world are complacent and do not seem to worry much about the future is that they are not aware of their real interests. At the moment they only focus on their short-term interests which, even if they might appear beneficial in the immediate future, could in the long run lead to catastrophe. Furthermore, they do not seem to use the limitless resources to which their freedom gives them access. They behave exactly as they are supposed to, without questioning or challenging the status quo. In this way, they passively let the situation worsen from day to day.

In order to combat this stagnation, Königsdorf suggests that scientists, and in particular those working in the field of natural sciences, should be taken more seriously in today's world. She justifies her view by explaining that, as scientists are the only group within society whose

⁴¹ This story is part of LV, 132-135. It was clearly inspired by Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, as Königsdorf herself admits in her interview with Frink and Stückrath, 67.

concern is nature, their objective interventions would clarify our present situation and the risks we are running, in order to make us understand what our real interests are. Furthermore, she is of the opinion that their contribution will be effective because scientists are not supposed to talk in abstract terms, but their observations should refer to our immediate environment, the one we perceive with our senses. Her thought also offers a reassuring perspective on the future, as the scientists' intervention is not solely aimed at bringing awareness into the world. On the contrary, their most important task should consist of looking for new solutions through research. In Königsdorf's words:

Gäbe es noch Naturwissenschaftler, es läge alles auf dem Tisch. Was die Welt zusammenhält, und was sie nicht mehr hält. Und zwar nicht dieses theoretische Konstrukt, das sich von Urknall zu Urknall spannt. Sondern die richtige Welt. Die man riechen, schmecken und anfassen kann. Sie würden vielleicht auf- und abschwören. Wenn es ums Leben geht. Und weiter forschen. (RW, 21)

Once this new level of awareness stemming from a clear definition of the dimensions of the ecological problems is reached, it would be easier, in Königsdorf's view, to take on a common, but complicated task, namely the salvation of the world. At the same time, this could help to re-orientate our society, which at the moment seems to be governed by money, towards this useful aim, without necessarily having to adopt another utopia. However, while speculating on the important role that scientists could play, she soon identifies two main problems: the first is that real scientists are nowhere to be found, the second relates to the influence of external factors on science preventing it from developing independently.

2.3.1.1.1 Königsdorf's Definition of a Real Scientist

After asking the readership whether they personally know a real scientist, in the essay 'Ikarus läßt fliegen', Königsdorf explains what she means by this term. In her explanation, she puts together a sort of checklist of characteristics, which often recalls negative examples of the scientists she describes in her short stories. For instance, an important point on

Königsdorf's checklist refers to the transparency of scientific work. Thus, a scientist should be able to understand very difficult concepts, and subsequently explain them in a very simple way. Both in the essays and in the short stories, Königsdorf criticises the rigidity generated by compartmentalised thinking, and the use of a very specific jargon only comprehensible to a few experts. In the short stories, she focuses in particular on the use of rhetorical language, partly due to the scientists' lack of honesty in describing how little they have achieved, and partly to the pressures imposed by the GDR's over ambitious economic plans. It is in this context that in 'Autodidakten' we can understand the pride of the 'Alte' that, in his report on the situation at the institute of mathematics, 'es war ihm gelungen den schmalen Grat zwischen "Ernst der Lage" und "bemerkenswerten Fortschritten" zu beschreiten' (LD, 162).

Other features of a real scientist should be simplicity, the ability to be amazed by the beauty of the world, the trust of his/her own understanding and a great passion to experiment. In general, most of the figures emerging from the short stories are calculating and opportunistic individuals whose final goal is to advance in their career, and enjoy the privileges that come with it. Therefore, we are very far from the description of a real scientist which Königsdorf formulates in her post-unification essays.

In this parade of characters incapable of living up to Königsdorf's description of the 'real' scientist, there is nevertheless an exception. As already mentioned, the story 'Kugelblitz' tells of a 'crazy' scientist, Rudolf Knack, whose only interest is to experiment. Not surprisingly, his passion for science and the obstinacy with which he pursues his ideas, combined with his courage to venture into still unexplored fields, make him an outcast from the scientific establishment. The fact that he does not look for any authorisation, praise, or external motivation to carry out his projects makes

him unacceptable to a system where everybody is asked to conform. Unfortunately, his perseverance and talents are not rewarded during his lifetime, but only after his death when it finally seems safe to honour such an unconventional man. Ironically, it is his perseverance against the bureaucratic societal order which makes him into a hero.

2.3.1.1.2 The Obstacles to the Development of Scientific Research

Rudolf Knack embodies the ideal scientist described by Königsdorf because he has the courage to carry out his work independently, regardless of the restrictions his superiors try to impose on him. He has to resort to work without the support of the institute, which leaves the question open of how much more he could have achieved, had he had the right means. At the same time, it is clear that remaining in the institute would have meant for him a loss of freedom, the impossibility to determine his research field. This was therefore the dilemma that many scientists had to face within the GDR: they could either reject the system in order to protect their freedom and in this way become outcasts, or enjoy the advantages of operating within the system if they were willing to accept the sacrifice of their independence. This situation poses the question as to whether it is true that in the GDR there were no real scientists or whether it would be more appropriate to state that it was the system itself which did not leave them any space.

The same question could be asked about the situation in post-unification German society. In the essays in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, in which Königsdorf analyses the situation of scientists within the market economy, she indicates that the latter is no more successful in providing the right framework for the development and progression of scientific research. Hence, with regard to the market system as well, it is not clear whether real scientists no longer exist or whether there can be no real scientists as a consequence of the fact that scientific

research, just as much as during the GDR, is not granted any independence. Many factors hinder its development. The following is Königsdorf's list of the major obstacles: 'Teamwork, eine wuchernde Bürokratie, außerwissenschaftliche Ziele, Wünsche von Geldgebern, das alles mindert seine [des Wissenschaftlers] Möglichkeit, die Richtung des Forschungsprozesses mitzubestimmen' (RW, 38).

Not only does this list show that neither of the two economic systems is able to promote the independent development of scientific research, but also that, in a very similar way, they both prevent it from progressing. Thus, the pressure exercised by the plan impeding scientists from pursuing their own interests seems to have been replaced by the pressure to fulfil the demands of the sponsors. Bureaucracy is another clear example of a problem which had existed in the GDR and still does in post-unification society. After criticising it in short stories such as 'Eine kollektive Leistung', in which the slowness imposed on science by the bureaucratic machine of the GDR is one of the reasons allowing the two Americans to publish a better version of the paper while the GDR scientists are still getting ready to publish the first draft, it should not come as a surprise if after 1989 Königsdorf's characters are found complaining about the amount of bureaucracy regulating life in the new society too: 'Überhaupt hatten sie mit soviel geballter Bürokratie nicht gerechnet. Sie hatten immer gedacht, wenigstens auf diesem Gebiet eine Weltspitzenleistung vorweisen zu können' (SR, 44).

This discussion on the relative advantages and disadvantages of the planned economy and the capitalist market for the development of scientific research had already started in *Respektloser Umgang*. Here, to begin with she wonders whether nuclear energy will be used more wisely in the socialist world in which economics does not seem to play such an important role as in the capitalist countries:

Es gibt einen Teil der Welt, in dem die ökonomischen Triebkräfte weniger vehement wirken. Man mag das beklagen. Aber wirken sie nicht zugleich weniger unheilvoll? Is es nicht besser, etwas langsamer voranzugehen und den Überblick zu behalten? Ich weiß nicht. Ich sehe keine andere Chance. (RU, 79)

Hence, in this passage she seems almost convinced that the planned economy offers the right framework for a responsible attitude to science. However, at another point in the text, she also formulates the thought that perhaps, without the spirit of competition which drives the economic system of the West, science would have not progressed as much: 'Hätte bei unserem Nützlichkeitsdenken die Atomforschung eine Chance gehabt? Der Ehrgeiz der Wissenschaftler. Der Kampf um die Priorität! Welche effektiven Triebkräfte! Bringt die Bürokratie das alles auf den Hund?' (RU, 69).

Now that she is gaining first-hand experience of how the capitalist system works, she is able to see that in neither society has science been granted enough freedom and independence. The most regrettable consequence of this is that any attempt to control and regulate intellectual activity also entails the suppression of creativity. The emphasis which Königsdorf puts on the importance of creativity is an aspect of her thought which has remained constant throughout the years. In post-unification society, creativity as a way to find solutions has become even more important given the ever-expanding dimensions of the ecological disaster and the fact that the growth of the world has already reached its limits. This is the reason why in the post-1989 essay 'Lieben Sie Schmetterlinge?' she continues to insist on the significance of creativity: 'Der Verzicht auf Kreativität und Effizienz ist tödlich' (RW, 12).

Her conviction that creativity should be the source of energy within every society and every sphere of life, including the domain of science, is why in her pre-1989 works Königsdorf strongly criticises the rigidity and conformity of GDR society. Unfortunately, while in the GDR creativity

was systematically repressed, in the new society it seems, as one of Königsdorf's characters in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* remarks, that it is wasted in marketing, which is also not very reassuring: 'Und ein Land, das den größten Teil seiner Kreativität in ein verlogenes Marketing stecke, sei auf dem besten Wege zu verkommen' (SR, 157). This is a further confirmation that neither system seems able to optimise its resources.

2.3.1.2 Continuities and Differences between Königsdorf's Pre-1989 Works and *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*

Even though the social, political and economic contexts which the essays in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* examine are profoundly different from the reality of Königsdorf's pre-1989 fictional works, I nevertheless believe that there are some continuities between these texts and the pre-1989 writings which are worth noting. Firstly, they all represent Königsdorf's fight against resignation, passive acceptance and mental laziness of citizens refusing to assume their own responsibility, whether in a socialist or in a capitalist world. Whether she speaks with an ironic or serious tone, all these works embody her attempt to look for alternatives to improve her present situation, and invite the readership to contribute to her quest for new ideas. Furthermore, although they have been written in very different historical periods, all of Königsdorf's works on science have a warning function. In other words, they serve the Cassandra function of literature.⁴²

These similarities between her pre- and post-unification works on science appear all the more significant if we take into account that Königsdorf herself seems to be striving towards establishing continuity between them. This is demonstrated by her decision to alternate her texts in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* with quotes from her previous works.

⁴² I introduced the Cassandra function of literature in section 2.2.3.3.

Apart from the above mentioned similarities, in general the essays on science were not well received by reviewers⁴³ in contrast to the pre-1989 works which had been very much praised. In fact, while the short stories made Königsdorf into a well-respected author in the GDR for the precision of their descriptions, their ironical and at the same time reflective tone, and the novels showed her ability to conduct a serious discussion on burning issues, these later essays on science were criticised for being too naïve, abstract and out-of-date. This is probably due to the fact that most of these texts were originally written as newspaper articles for Eastern German dailies. As they were conceived to discuss current issues, she did not need to explain the socio-political context to which they referred as it was implicit. For example, the text 'Lieben Sie Schmetterlinge?', written just before the 1992 Rio Conference, deals with environmental issues which were much debated and very high on the agenda at that specific point in time. However, if in 1992 Königsdorf's concern with issues of ecology and her approach to environmental problems reflected the general climate and represented an important contribution to an ongoing debate, this was not necessarily the case in 1994, when the collection *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* was published. In order to talk in 1994 about issues which were up-to-date in 1992 she should perhaps have tried to embed her arguments and suggestions in their historical and political framework. However, she does not mention specific political situations, countries or events to help the readership to create the context in which she originally formulated her theories.

⁴³ See for example Gutschke, I., 'Ängste als Signale', *Neues Deutschland*, 14.10.1994, Schwinn, R. 'Von Untergang und Rettung', *Lesart*, 04.1994, and Heise, U., 'Märchen für Erwachsene', *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, 17./18.09.1994. In this context, I would like to point out that, as opposed to the essays on science, Königsdorf's more personal texts were in general very positively reviewed. See for example Berg, A., 'Das Ozonloch und der Osten', *Neues Deutschland*, 05.09.1994, Berkholz, S., 'Die Gegenwart – ein Gemischtwarenladen', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26.03.1995 and 'Mut zu stolzen Tönen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18.01.1995. I also discuss these texts in section 3.4.2.

One could argue that one of the reasons why Königsdorf decided to voice her concerns vis-à-vis the development of society through essays rather than through fiction as she had done prior to 1989 is the fact that she wanted to have a more direct impact on the readership. As she is constantly underlining the urgency of the situation and is afraid that future generations will accuse her generation of having known the problems but refused to act upon them, it is possible that she preferred to adopt the essay form as it allows to go straight to the point. While with the pre-1989 works the readers are stimulated to form their own opinions and draw their own conclusions, it is plausible that when Königsdorf published her essays, she felt that there was no time left to encourage them to do that. Instead she wanted to make sure that they got her ideas as soon as possible, which justifies her decision to write newspaper articles. This attitude might have two reasons: on the one hand, she was clearly worried that it would soon be no longer possible to avert the ecological disaster, on the other hand it could reflect a particular stage in her life, perhaps the worsening of her health condition, which could have made her feel as if she did not have much more time at her disposal to talk openly to her readers.

Ironically, while the pre-1989 works turned out to be instances of successful thought-provoking literature which, because of the demands they place on the readership, cannot be easily dismissed, the same cannot be said about the essays. In fact, they tend to alienate the audience, as they make them feel like passive recipients of a moral lesson, which they did not ask for. This has the effect of provoking irritation, which goes against Königsdorf's original intention to raise awareness through literature. For this purpose, the pre-1989 fiction has without doubt proved to be a much more effective genre. This is surely due to the precision of Königsdorf's style in describing characters and situations, but also to the fact that her material is very credible. This stems from Königsdorf's familiarity with the scientific environment, which put her in a position to reproduce some of its

most absurd and grotesque traits. Moreover, the fact that her experience offers a concrete example of how it was possible to break away from the conventionalities and the suffocating routine of the scientific establishment lends a touch of legitimacy to her critical tone.

2.3.2 Mathematics in the Post-Unification Novels

While in her non-fictional writings Königsdorf underlines the importance of science and of the scientist for the well-being of contemporary society, the way in which she discusses mathematics and the impact that this has on the individual in her post-unification novels is rather negative. It is in fact often associated with the ideas of madness and emotional repression and even compared to the disease afflicting the grandmother in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, for they both end up depriving the individual of his/her own personality: '[Die Mathematik] saugt den Menschen aus' (EG, 49) and '[die Krankheit] [nistet] sich wie eine mörderische Spinne im Kopf des Menschen [ein] und [saugt] langsam, aber unaufhaltsam dessen Persönlichkeit [aus]' (EG, 62). This negative portrayal of mathematics emerges especially in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* and in the above mentioned *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, in which some of the main characters are mathematicians who find it difficult to cope with the real world. In particular, the figures of Alice from *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* and of Thomas from *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* are examples of very successful mathematicians who, despite their professional success, have not found emotional stability.

The personal shortcomings of these characters, who also have in common the fact that they both have apparently solved the famous 'dritten Kurzschen Problem', one of those mathematical problems which mathematicians have been trying to solve for over hundred years (SR, 17), is strictly related to mathematics. In fact, both these figures adopted mathematics as the refuge from the many contradictions existing in the

world, which they felt they could not accept in its complexity. Thus, as Alice grew up with a very strong mother, who never admitted to doubts and insecurities, in order to build a world for herself, in which she could also have some certainties, she chose to dedicate herself heart and soul to mathematics: 'Die Alice hatte sich in die einfachen Wahrheiten der Zahlographie geflüchtet' (SR, 21).

In the case of Thomas, his passion for mathematics is explained through a rather banal episode from his childhood in which for the first time he was confronted with the irrational side of life. Although his father was the real 'perpetrator', one Christmas Thomas was accused of having stolen a cherry and stained the tablecloth with it. The reaction of the family members, who, without having seen him taking the cherry, unanimously assumed that he was the one who did it, left Thomas completely puzzled. He could not defend himself and got angry at the thought that it was possible to do something without even being aware of it. His shock was such that this episode is indicated by the third-person narrator as the moment in which Thomas seems to give up trying to understand the meaning of life and takes refuge in mathematics. Mathematics then comes to represent for him the tool through which he can impose an order on things by embedding them in a rational framework. As a result, he has to reject everything which is irrational:

Vielleicht war damals der Grundstein für seine Liebe zur Mathematik gelegt worden. Weil er sich der komplizierten Logik des Lebens nicht gewachsen fühlte. Weil die Mathematik den, der sich ihr unterwarf, unangreifbar machte.
(EG, 32)

Therefore mathematics also represents for Thomas what makes him special. It almost protects him, is something he can always rely on, and which belongs only to him. His sister Franziska envies him for this, but she is also the one who, having access to the isolated world of her brother, openly says to him that she finds it difficult to understand how one can conceive of

mathematics as the centre of one's world (EG, 23). Franziska criticises her brother for dedicating himself to something as sterile as mathematics and advises him to do 'was Menschlicheres' (EG, 81). However, despite his sister's advice, Thomas continues to suppress the emotional side of life and resorts to spending most of his time in his room working at his computer. In this manner, he represses his emotionality by avoiding intimate relationships with other people. This is what makes him behave coldly and indifferently towards the other members of the family. He cannot, for example, help his mother look after his beloved grandmother, he cannot talk to his father without humiliating him, and even though he seems to have a better relationship to his sister, he only communicates with her via e-mail. Moreover, although he is obviously not feeling comfortable at home, he nevertheless lacks the courage to leave despite his plans to move abroad, to Australia for instance. It is then easy to see how mathematics has turned Thomas into a prisoner of himself: he cannot do without it because otherwise he would feel lost. At the same time he realises that because of his obsession with rationality, he is unable to behave as a well-balanced person.

After much repression, and once Franziska, despite her young age, has left the parents' house, Thomas suffers a nervous breakdown, during which he destroys his computer with the solution to the 'dritte Kurzsche Problem' that would have made him well-known around the world. After smashing the computer, Thomas goes to the garden to vent his anger and frustration. This is where the neighbours find him digging a hole in a trance-like state. Perhaps, given Thomas's attitude to life, he expresses his desperation by digging as an attempt to re-establish contact with nature and a more natural way of living. On a symbolical level, the decision to dig could also be interpreted as a way in which somebody like Thomas, who has always refused to analyse things, may find some meaning and depth to

life. Alternatively, it could be seen as the symbolic burial of the type of life that he has led up until now.

Alice too has suffered a nervous breakdown and spent a certain period of her life in the famous ‘Station Fünf’, the hospital department for mental illnesses. Even though we make her acquaintance once her experience in the clinic already belongs to the past, we can easily deduce that the reasons why she ended up there are not so dissimilar from the ones which provoked Thomas’s breakdown. Like Thomas, Alice too finds it difficult to build rewarding relationships. In her case, it is a very strong desire to be loved which makes her confuse the issues. Thus, in her relationship to her mother, she uses her achievements as a means of earning love. However, it is clear that in this way she never feels loved as the person she is in reality, and that is probably why she breaks down. In the clinic she seems to have understood how important it is to hold on to oneself and to one’s beliefs, which is ultimately what gives her the courage to refuse to undergo the humiliating experience of appearing in front of the ‘Integritätskommission’,⁴⁴ the committee charged with the task of deciding who in the Institute of Mathematics was not too morally corrupted and thus able to continue working there. Nevertheless, this does not prevent her from abandoning the flat when the situation gets difficult and simply vanishing.

Since in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* Königsdorf introduces Thomas as the real finder of the solution to the ‘dritte Kurzsche Problem’, one could speculate that the reason why Alice disappears is because she has discovered that she has made a mistake. After all, this had already happened the first time that Königsdorf presented the ‘dritte Kurzsche Problem’. In the story ‘Lemma I’, once Johanna has already given in her

⁴⁴ I deal with Alice’s refusal to appear in front of the ‘Integritätskommission’ in section 5.3.2.2.

Ph.D. thesis with the solution to the problem, she realises that it is wrong. Hence, the humiliation of having been in the spotlight of the scientific establishment for something she did not achieve could have been too much to bear for Alice, who might have lost her sense of self-worth and for this reason decided to become a dropout.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the focus on mathematics is a highly autobiographically based element. As discussed in the context of the short stories, it should be remembered that Königsdorf, after working many years as a mathematician, often described her decision to turn to literature as a liberation from an all too rational vision of the world, from a discipline too rigid to allow her to develop the different aspects of her subjectivity, including her emotional side. If we link Königsdorf's personal experience to the disturbed and underdeveloped personalities of Alice and Thomas, we can easily come to the conclusion that through these characters she is perhaps trying to imagine how her life would have turned out, had she not found an outlet in literature. In an interview, Königsdorf herself seems to hint that writing for her became almost a physical need, as if it had been a defence mechanism of her body telling her that it was high time to start doing something different: '[i]rgendwann begann sich mein Körper zu wehren. [...] In dieser Situation brachen die ersten Geschichten wirklich ungerufen aus mir heraus.'⁴⁵

2.4 Conclusion

Despite the fact that Königsdorf made the transition from full-time scientist to full-time writer, her scientific background never stops having an impact on her writings. Although it has always been present, it is important to note that the different ways in which it manifests itself show that throughout her career Königsdorf has been struggling to find a well-balanced relationship

⁴⁵ Interview with Zimmermann and Frölich. This is virtually the same image used in her 'Nachsatz' to MT, quoted in section 2.2.1.

to science. On the one hand, she explains that it is because she had worked as a mathematician for a long time that at a certain point she felt she was no longer able to communicate. In this sense, mathematics is synonymous with emotional repression and rational discipline, preventing individuals from developing their spontaneous side. This is the way in which it is also portrayed through the characters of Alice and Thomas in the post-unification novels *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*.

On the other hand, Königsdorf is convinced that science has to play a key role in improving the state of the world. The worsening of the ecological disaster, the widening of the gap between rich and poor, and other problems in the 1990s strengthened her conviction about the role of science, as shown by the essays in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*. In other words, while on a personal level Königsdorf took refuge in the domain of literature to escape the rigidity involved in mathematics, she maintained her belief that science can contribute to the well-being of mankind.

Despite Königsdorf's complicated attitude to science, it is indisputable that her scientific background has played a fundamental role in endowing her with a different perspective on the issues she deals with. Perhaps more importantly, without her experience of the scientific environment it is doubtful whether she would have ever become a writer.⁴⁶ This is not only true in the negative sense of the frustration which Königsdorf experienced in her profession. It is also important to remember that the scientific environment which Königsdorf was part of provided her with the microcosm described in many of the pre-1989 short stories which she used to illustrate the mal-functioning of society as a whole. Because of its many imperfections, it inspired and motivated her to start something

⁴⁶ In section 5.2.1. I point out that another of the reasons why she starts writing was her illness.

different in order to contribute to the improvement of living and working conditions within the GDR. This is acknowledged by Königsdorf herself, who stated:

Aus nachträglicher Sicht war mein Leben als Wissenschaftlerin keinesfalls ein Umweg. Ein bestimmter, konkreter Erfahrungsraum ist für das Schreiben notwendig. Man braucht mindestens einen Bereich, dem man wirklich zugehört, den man sehr genau kennt und wo man nicht nur äußerer Beobachter ist. Das wird bei jedem ein anderer sein. Ich bin froh, daß es sich bei mir gerade um die Wissenschaft handelt, weil sie von beträchtlicher Zukunftsrelevanz ist.⁴⁷

As Königsdorf herself points out, the constant preoccupation with the future which emerges from all her writings on science is perhaps the most interesting consequence of her scientific background. This had the effect that she wrote most of her works with the Cassandra function of literature in mind, which subsequently turns out to be the strongest element of continuity linking the pre-1989 to the post-unification works. Thus, in the short stories she makes the readership aware of the dangers of conformity. In *Ungelegener Befund* she presents the possible consequences of the suppression of truth, while in *Respektloser Umgang* and in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* she draws attention to the risks inherent in a disrespectful attitude towards the environment and other people. In short, she shows an increasing sense of commitment towards the promotion of a more humane society, which was first stimulated by the corruption of the GDR scientific environment and then by the Cold War, and has continued up to the present day. In all these instances, her aim in criticising the present and at times even the past is to make sure that the future will be better.

While I have underlined the thematic continuity and the similarity of the final aim of these works, there is nevertheless a difference between the way in which the post-unification collection *Über die unverzügliche*

⁴⁷ Interview with Zimmermann and Frölich.

Rettung der Welt and the works written before 1989 affect the readership. While they are all thought-provoking works, the post-unification non-fictional writings have not been received as well as the pre-1989-90 short stories and novels. This indicates that the adoption of a new genre has not facilitated Königsdorf's task of raising awareness and inviting the readership to join actively in the discussion. The success of the short stories as an effective genre has been confirmed by the fact that in 1998 a new paperback selection of the short stories published in 1978, 1982 and 1988 came out under the title *Der gewöhnliche Wahnsinn*,⁴⁸ while *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* has never been either reprinted as a hardback or published in paperback form.

⁴⁸ This new selection includes some of the stories dealing with the science environment, such as 'Lemma I', 55-64, 'Der unangemessene Aufstand des Zahlographen Karl-Egon Kuller', 65-76 and 'Polymax', 96-102.

Chapter Three

Helga Königsdorf's Identity as an Intellectual

3.1 Introduction

It is generally accepted that the term 'intellectual' was introduced into Western Europe at the end of the 19th century with the Dreyfus Affair, when in France Emile Zola published his article 'J'accuse' in defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, who had been unjustly imprisoned.¹ When it first started being widely used, the term intellectual was therefore closely associated with the idea of intervening in politics on the supposition of representing the nation's conscience on basic political questions. In the course of the centuries, however, this connotation of intellectual was adapted to the changing historical situations and different cultural and political frameworks of the various countries across the world. Hence, since the term intellectual can be as broad as to indicate, in the sociological sense, any occupation involving the intellect, as in the antonym of manual labour, it is impossible in this context to undergo a survey of all its different meanings and its historical evolution across cultures.

In the light of the difficulties presented by this term, as a first step towards a closer definition of it, it is useful to specify that in my consideration of Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual I maintain the connotation it had assumed at the time of the Dreyfus Affair of the intellectual figure as somebody intervening in the public sphere. My aim in this chapter is therefore to analyse the evolution of Königsdorf's voice as a critical figure within the public realm from the GDR era, across the

¹ Jennigs, J. and Kemp-Welch, A., 'The Century of the Intellectual: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie', in Jennigs, J. and Kemp-Welch, A., *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-21 (here 7). Jennigs and Kemp-Welch specify that references to the term 'intellectual' can be found also earlier than the Dreyfus Affair.

‘peaceful Revolution’ to the post-unification years mainly by taking into account her non-fictional writings.

However, even the association of the term intellectual with intervention is a broad area of discussion, as demonstrated by the substantial body of literature dealing with this topic. In particular, one of the central issues which intellectuals have confronted over time, in the different historical eras and social contexts, appears to be the dilemma of autonomy. A reference point in this context is *La Trahison des clercs*² by Julien Benda who advocates that the intellectual has to defend the eternal values of truth and justice in a condition of complete autonomy, detached from societal pressures and worldly interests. Almost opposed to Benda’s position, another reference point with regard to the question of autonomy is Antonio Gramsci’s theory about the intellectual’s function within society. His idea of the ‘organic intellectual’, a term he uses to express that intellectuals are closely connected to a specific class in a way that their task becomes the defence of the interests of the latter, indicates that he rejects the notion of intellectuals as operating independently from society and argues that the opposite is desirable.³ Benda’s choice to place the intellectual in a space where external influences such as nationality, language, etc. do not to exist seems rather idealistic. At the same time, Gramsci’s idea of intellectuals engaged for a political cause can have serious consequences. This became apparent in the post-communist era when many intellectuals, including Königsdorf, realised that their subservience to the Communist Party drove them into self-deception and limited their capacity to maintain their objectivity.

² Benda, J., *La Trahison des clercs* (Paris: Grasset, 1975), first published in 1927. Hallberg points out that this work has been reissued in Germany in the aftermath of the ‘peaceful Revolution’ to support the sceptical views on the role played by GDR intellectuals. See Hallberg, R. von (ed.), *Literary Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State* (Chicago, London: The University Press of Chicago, 1996), 14.

³ For a discussion of Gramsci’s ideas see Bellamy, R., ‘The Intellectual as Social Critic: Antonio Gramsci and Michael Walzer’, in Jennigs, J. and Kemp-Welch, A., *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salmon Rushdie* [see note 1 above], 25-44.

A more up-to-date position vis-à-vis the meaning of intellectual is, in my view, that of Edward Said who, in his 1993 Reith Lectures which are partly a re-working of Benda's ideas applied to our time, defined the intellectual as 'an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public'.⁴ In his outline of the intellectual figure, Said added that the intellectual 'is neither a pacifier nor a consensus builder, but someone whose being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made cliches, or the smooth, ever-so-accomodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do'.⁵ This means that when confronted with issues of loyalty, for example to a country or, as in Königsdorf's case to a political party, intellectuals should never sacrifice their critical sense to solidarity with the group they belong to.

Although Said's interpretation of the intellectual figure is inspired by very high ideals rejecting any sort of compromise, it is nevertheless in essence appropriate as a framework of discussion for Königsdorf's evolution as an intellectual. While during the GDR Königsdorf, as she herself admitted, allowed her critical sense to be diminished by the sense of loyalty she felt towards the Party, the 'peaceful Revolution' gave her the courage to become an independent critical voice. In line with Said's ideas, Königsdorf's experience taught her the importance of preserving her autonomy in order not to impair her critical abilities.

It was in the aftermath of the collapse of the GDR that Königsdorf found herself grappling with the question of intellectual autonomy for the first time. As Party and writers were pursuing the same ideological goals, this initially created the illusion that in the GDR there was no need for the

⁴ Said, E., *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994), 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

intellectual class to challenge the ruling class, a conflict often indicated as the struggle between 'intellect' (*Geist*) and 'power' (*Macht*).⁶ Although this illusion was short-lived, as the relationship between artists and Party leadership continued to be characterised by the attempt of the artists to enjoy absolute freedom and that of the Party to control the creative production of the country, the events of 1989-90 nevertheless brought about the debate on the intellectuals' ambiguous position as relatively privileged members⁷ of a repressive society. In the few months following the fall of the Wall, this debate assumed unexpected dimensions and ended up diminishing the credibility of the left-wing intellectual scene in East and West.

Particularly in the former GDR, where, in the absence of a critical press, literary intellectuals had taken on the task in their works of replacing journalism by articulating public discontent and exposing the shortcomings of the system, the revelations about the corruption of the SED compromised their close relationship with the readers. First of all, a remarkable shift of public trust, away from the intellectuals, increasingly seen as part of a privileged elite rather than the voice of the people, towards the press, now freed from the SED's manipulation,⁸ took place. Secondly, the

⁶ This is what Johannes R. Becher claimed after having been appointed Minister of Culture: 'Nie waren Kunst und Dichtung so verbunden mit der Macht wie bei uns, nie war die Macht so aufgeschlossen gegenüber Kunst und Dichtung wie bei uns. Geist und Macht – diese tragische Gegensätzlichkeit im Vergangenen geht ihrer Lösung entgegen'. See the Preface to Goodbody, A. and Tate, D. (eds), *Geist und Macht* [see note 3 of the Introduction], 1-3 (here 1).

⁷ The Writers' Union helped writers financially by providing them with interest-free loans and fellowships. It also offered them assistance in the search for flats and inexpensive holiday resorts and, above all, arranged trips abroad. Furthermore, the writers were entitled to the 12-15% of the selling price of their books - a higher percentage than in West Germany - and had the possibility to win a multitude to prices. In this context Königsdorf points out that the real privilege which GDR intellectuals enjoyed was that of being able to identify themselves with their work (MS, 119). See also section 3.2.2.2.

⁸ For an account of the pressure exercised by the Central Committee (ZK) of the SED on the media, see Maron, M., *Flugasche* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1981). The protagonist of this novel is Josefa Nadler, a journalist who writes a report on a town in the GDR - the town is called B., which could stand for Bitterfeld - in which she talks about pollution and bad working conditions. Even though the report is based on facts, it was censored. Hence, the novel poses the question whether journalists should renounce the whole truth and keep their job in the hope that they will be at least able to tell part of the truth or refuse to compromise and risk everything.

intellectuals' ideological commitment to socialism, which led them to misinterpret the GDR people's aspirations by linking the emerging form of a grass-root democracy (*Basisdemokratie*) with the hopes for a reform of the socialist project,⁹ contributed to worsening this already precarious relationship. Such a political failure became undeniable once the results of the 1990 March elections were announced, showing that the GDR majority had decided to import the democratic capitalism of the FRG as incorporated by Helmut Kohl and his party.

This failure soon acquired a literary and cultural dimension in the summer and autumn of 1990 with the acrimonious German-German literature dispute known as *Literaturstreit*,¹⁰ which was a clear sign that there was an urgent need for the re-definition of the intellectuals' political role and their responsibilities in East and West alike. The dispute was sparked off by the publication of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* in 1990, a book she had largely written in 1979 about her experience of being under the surveillance of the Stasi. In the first phase, Wolf stood alone in the firing line for having portrayed herself as the victim of a system from which she had often benefited. However, the dispute soon widened out to include all left-wing intellectuals in both Germanies,¹¹ who were condemned in the

⁹ For instance, the petition 'Für unser Land', which a group of GDR intellectuals put together on 26 November 1989, indicates that at this point in time they hoped to reform socialism. In this brief text they outlined the two possible developments for the future of the GDR: either it was to remain independent or to surrender itself to the FRG. The first option implied the possibility of building a new country, in which 'Frieden und soziale Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit des einzelnen, Freizügigkeit aller und die Bewahrung der Umwelt gewährleistet sind'. Alternatively, the GDR would sell out its material and moral values and become subject to the FRG. They concluded the text with an appeal to the GDR people to sign the petition if, like them, they felt that they still had a chance 'in gleichberechtigter Nachbarschaft zu allen Staaten Europas eine sozialistische Alternative zur Bundesrepublik zu entwickeln', in Maier, G., *Die Wende in der DDR* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1991), 53. This petition was first published in *Neues Deutschland*, 28.11.1989.

¹⁰ See also footnote 12 of the Introduction.

¹¹ In the context of the left-wing intellectuals in West Germany, one should point out that their significance had begun waning in the 1980s. This is illustrated by the fact that in 1981, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* published a six-part series entitled 'Das Verstummen der Intellektuellen'. See Bullivant, K., *The Future of German Literature* (Oxford; Providence: Berg, 1994), 76. The 1980s intellectuals' crisis was also observed by the writer Patrick Süskind as shown in his overview of the role of writers in post-war West Germany: 'Das Verhältnis zu dem Staat, in dem wir lebten, war zunächst zurückhaltend skeptisch, später aufmüpfig, dann pragmatisch, und zuletzt vielleicht sogar von distanzierter Sympathie geprägt', in Weinfeld, W. and Korte, K.-R. (eds),

Western German press for having tolerated the lack of democracy in the GDR. Further discoveries about the activities of the State Security Service (*Stasi*) and the involvement of some authors with it - including Wolf - fuelled the argument regarding their alleged intellectual bankruptcy. Ultimately, the fact that the cultural scene was associated with the corruption of the SED resulted in discrediting Eastern German literature.

Although Königsdorf was never personally involved in the *Literaturstreit* or accused of having collaborated with the Stasi, she was nevertheless one of those GDR authors who, while critical of the development of 'real existing socialism' and hoping to encourage reforms from within, also belonged to the country's elite as a published writer and a well-respected scientist. Hence, even if indirectly, the accusations levelled against left-wing intellectuals after the fall of the Wall concerned her as well and made her reflect on her role and responsibility as a critical figure.

In order to explore how Königsdorf's transformed herself from being a GDR intellectual and supporter of socialism into a morally concerned but independent critical voice, I will first present the position which Königsdorf occupied and the interests she manifested during the early GDR years as a point of departure for retracing her evolution as an intellectual during her literary career. In the context of the role she played in the GDR, a key concept is certainly the respect for human dignity, the principle she adopted as a yardstick to judge the development of society under the SED regime. This idea is particularly significant, for it offers her a reference point also during and after the 'peaceful Revolution' from which to assess the structures of East Germany, her behaviour both as a supporter of socialism and as a writer, and the process of unification.

Even though during the Revolution Königsdorf started developing feelings of shame for having supported an undemocratic regime, she did not see it as the time to retreat from the intellectual scene. On the contrary, since she interpreted the Revolution as the right opportunity to reform the GDR according to a 'third way' democratic socialism, the autumn of 1989 became for her a time of most intense intellectual activity, in which she was constantly re-assessing, analysing, suggesting and criticising. She did so through newspaper articles, essays and speeches. The fact that in this period she only wrote non-fiction¹² is clearly a response to the need felt both by writers and readers to communicate quickly and openly, which finally became possible through the media once the SED regime ceased to have full control over them. As shown by her prolific production of non-fictional material collected in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* and *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen*, Königsdorf is without doubt one of the authors who made best use of the new public spheres opened by the 'peaceful Revolution'.¹³

The second phase of re-assessment took place after the March elections of 1990, which forced Königsdorf to revise her political identity. The decision made by the Eastern Germans to opt for unification rather than for socialism 'with a human face' led to a fundamental change in her identity, as the intellectual and political aspects of it, which up until then had co-existed, could no longer be reconciled. In the end, this resulted in Königsdorf renouncing her political ideals. Although she largely deals with her political identity in her non-fictional writings, her political development is also discussed through the autobiographically based protagonist of the

¹² Strictly speaking, the articles and essays written in the years 1989-90 are not Königsdorf's first approach to non-fiction. In fact she had experimented with this genre also in 1986-87, when she was commissioned to write a monthly column for the Swiss magazine *Weltwoche*. An example of the articles she wrote in this period is 'Ein Ausflug am Wochenende', which was re-published in 1994 as part of RW, 77-79.

¹³ For other examples of non-fictional works produced in this period, see note 14 of the Introduction.

novel *Gleich neben Afrika*, the only fictional work to which I will extensively refer in this chapter.

As mentioned above, the result of the March elections highlighted the fact that over time the Eastern German intellectuals had lost touch with the very people they thought they represented. In the light of the divergence of ideas and aspirations between citizens and writers, Königsdorf tried to re-establish her understanding of the readership by interviewing them on their thoughts and emotions regarding the impending disappearance of the GDR. The result is a series of portraits of GDR citizens, assembled under the title *Adieu DDR* and significantly published on the date of German unification, 3 October 1990. This first volume of interviews was followed in 1995 by a second one, entitled *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, which presents an Eastern and Western German perspective on life in unified Germany.

After her frenetic activity in 1989-90, Königsdorf continued to write non-fiction throughout the first post-unification years, probably because this genre offered her greater scope for clarity and directness. Some of the non-fictional writings of these years are collected under the title *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*,¹⁴ which appeared in 1994. This work attests to Königsdorf's continuous presence within the media landscape of unified Germany and to her unbroken commitment to promoting society's welfare, which has deeply marked her identity as an intellectual throughout her career -although with the significant difference that after 1990 her message is no longer based on socialist ideals.

¹⁴ Many of the articles which make up RW first appeared in the newspaper *Sächsische Zeitung*, for which in 1993 Königsdorf was writing a monthly column. See for example the texts 'Laßt uns eine Pyramide bauen, 31-34, 'Meine Freunde und ich', 51-53, 'Ganz normal deutsch', 71-74, and 'Es müssen nicht immer Lackbilder sein', 89-91. These were published respectively on 22.10.1993, 22.11.1993, 20.08.1993 and 17.09.1993.

Hence, the analysis of Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual will be structured around three main historical phases: the GDR era, 1989-90 and the post-unification years. Special attention will be devoted to the period from the 'peaceful Revolution' to unification as this was the time in which Königsdorf faced radical changes, especially since the events of 1989-90 completely transformed the cultural and political environment of which she was part. By outlining her development as an intellectual in each of these phases, it is my intention to assess the extent to which she managed to renew and integrate herself into the cultural scene of unified Germany.

3.2 Prior to 1989: the Harmonious Co-existence of Königsdorf's Intellectual and Political Identities

3.2.1 Königsdorf's Experience of the Relationship between 'Intellect' (*Geist*) and 'Power' (*Macht*)

Despite the claim that in the GDR the conflict between 'intellect' and 'power' had been overcome, the more or less covert struggles between Party officials trying to control the cultural sphere in order to protect their power, and writers defending their artistic autonomy, had existed right from the first years of the GDR's existence and had their peaks after Wolf Biermann's expatriation in 1976¹⁵ and the expulsion of Stefan Heym and eight other writers from the Berlin Writers' Union in 1979. Nevertheless, while many former GDR authors had great difficulty in reconciling 'intellect' and 'power', Königsdorf never found herself in direct conflict with the authorities. In other words, as she never felt discriminated against

¹⁵ In the essay 'The Politics of Confrontation: The Biermann Affair and its Consequences', Ian Wallace argues that the SED's politics of confrontation set into motion with Biermann's expatriation 'accelerated a realisation of what many had long suspected - that the much-vaunted symbiosis of Party and writers was in fact an ideological illusion which could never be translated into practice. This was a realisation which with varying degrees of speed dawned on one GDR writer after another after November 1976'. See Wallace, I., 'The Politics of Confrontation: The Biermann Affair and its Consequences', in Goodbody, A. and Tate, D. (eds), *Geist und Macht* [see note 3 of the Introduction], 68. In note 3 of the Introduction I also point out that other scholars, Dennis Tate for instance, argue that Biermann's expatriation is one of the many events which led to the writers' loss of illusions about their hopes of working together with the Party.

or hindered in her writing activity by censorship, she did not experience any friction between her loyalty to the Party and her independence as a writer.¹⁶

The only piece of writing in which Königsdorf ironically complains about the writing conditions in the GDR is the short story 'Ehrenwort - Ich will nie wieder dichten',¹⁷ in which the protagonist transforms herself overnight into a poet. The reason for this transformation is the sudden ending of a long-standing 'abstinence from thinking' which enables this fearful, conformist and sensible manager of a socialist collective to become a courageous, rebellious writer: '[e]ines Tages öffnet das Unbewußte seine Schleusen, und die solange erfolgreich verdrängten Fragen brechen sich eine Bahn' (LD, 9).

However, after a period of great inspiration, the first time the protagonist writes down two of her poems she starts feeling scared, since in the last twenty years she has never written anything without the approval of her superior. While she is ironically relieved to know that she has to inform him about it, she does not realise that this is the beginning of the end of her career as a poet. In fact, this starts a chain reaction in which all the various managers within the hierarchy of the collective have to be informed. Nobody is enthusiastic about it; by contrast she is isolated and seen as a traitor, especially after her direct superior is punished for not being able to control his colleagues expressing emotions, which, as Königsdorf ironically

¹⁶ In an interview Königsdorf talks about censorship: apart from an environmental story which was not published and others which were slightly changed in discussion with her lecturers, she was able to write undisturbed by the censorship. See interview with Frink and Stückrath [see note 3 of Chapter 2], 64-65. The environmental story to which Königsdorf refers could be the one mentioned by Heinz Plavius in his official report, 'Abgerüchte des Gaswerks'. Although he does raise objections to some passages of the story, which to him seem ambiguous, he nevertheless recommends the publication of the collection as a whole. In the report by Waltraut Mohnholz and Ursula Emmerich, this story is not cited and therefore it remains unclear why it was suppressed. By contrast, there is another story mentioned in their report, which was never published. The title was 'Über Könige...' and the reason given by Ursula Emmerich for excluding it is that the text was not ready for publication and did not add anything new to the collection. See Bundesarchiv, DR1 (Ministerium für Kultur)/2115, Helga Königsdorf, "Meine ungehörigen Träume".

¹⁷ This story is part of LD, 7-20.

points out, they were permitted to have, but not to talk about. Her family is not happy about her new activity either. She becomes a source of embarrassment to her son and her husband ends up asking for a divorce. Even her extended family feels threatened by her new identity. In the end, the difficulties she is creating for the people around her, her own fears and the fact that her superiors, although they do not directly forbid her to write, intimidate her, make her give up poetry. She then returns to being the 'sensible' person she was before and, as a means of repressing her impulses, even ends up writing a letter to her superior on behalf of the director, in which she states that she should no longer be allowed to write poems.

The story illustrates some of the inhibitions which Königsdorf most probably experienced at the beginning of her writing career. The fact that she had to deal with self-censorship does not come as a surprise, especially if we consider that she was a scientist writing about the scientific environment, which did not make her very popular with some of her colleagues. Moreover, it is easy to see how after a career as a scientist, which presupposes the use of a certain language and style, it must have been quite unusual for her to be able to articulate her own feelings and thoughts more freely, even if this possibility was one of the key reasons why she started writing.¹⁸

This story is however the only example in which Königsdorf tackles issues of censorship and self-censorship. For the rest, even if as the story demonstrates she was aware of issues of censorship, she never appears to have been directly involved with the above-mentioned power struggles between authorities and artists. This is partly related to the fact that she only started writing in 1978. Even though this was a period in which the

¹⁸ I dealt with the fact that Königsdorf was seen as a denigrator of the scientific establishment by some of her colleagues and why at a certain point in her life she switched to literature in section 2.2.1.

Party was using very repressive measures to re-assert its power over intellectuals alienated by the Biermann Affair,¹⁹ Königsdorf was not then fully engaged in the cultural discourse of the country. Her marginal involvement with literature, which at this point in time still represented for her a leisure occupation, was a consequence of her full-time career as a mathematician at the Academy of Sciences, a relatively liberal environment in which scientists enjoyed a considerable degree of freedom.²⁰

Therefore, since in her experience of the GDR her political partisanship, that is her loyalty to the SED, never became an impediment to her independent intellectual activity, she was able to continue to write until 1989 on the basis of the

Annahme, in diese Struktur [der DDR] von innen her opponierend eingreifen zu können, in der Erwartung auf Veränderungen ohne Zusammenbruch bzw. auf Akzeptanzbereitschaft des Staates gegenüber wirklicher grundsätzlicher Kritik, ohne die Androhung von Gewalt oder Ausgrenzung.²¹

This assumption clarifies how, on a literary level, Königsdorf managed to combine the political and intellectual dimensions of her identity. By being critical of the development of the GDR in the expectation that it could be changed for the better, she was able to fulfil both her obligations as a

¹⁹ An idea of the tense climate following Biermann's expatriation is also given by Günter de Bruyn in his autobiography *Vierzig Jahre*: 'In jener Nacht, als die Stasi-Leute die Haustür umstanden, war beim Abschied von Gerhard und Christa Wolf galgenhumorig davon die Rede, daß unsere Romane mit Gegenwartsstoffen künftig bei der Zensur keine Chance mehr haben würden', Bruyn, G. de, *Vierzig Jahre: Ein Lebensbericht* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1996), 214.

²⁰ This is how the Academy of Sciences was described by one of its members: 'The Academy of Sciences was always a particular construction. It was distinguished from the university by virtue of the fact that there was no teaching going on there, so the ideological pressure was not as severe as it was at university. It was always an attempt to pursue a particular policy toward the intelligentsia, to get specialists to stay in the GDR and let them work relatively undisturbed. In political and ideological terms, the academy was an idyll by comparison to the university. That was an important difference. I myself was at university long enough to be able to appreciate this difference. The Academy was always viewed as the bastion of the bourgeois intelligentsia. That explains in part why people suddenly came out of there that were totally unknown, but who had of course been doing serious scholarly work and who had, on the side, in small groups, in little circles or otherwise developed their political convictions, their political utopias'. Cited by Torpey, J. C., *Intellectuals, Socialism and Dissent* [see note 21 of Chapter 2], 141.

²¹ Hörnigk, F., 'Die Literatur ist zuständig: Über das Verhältnis von Literatur und Politik in der DDR', in Goodbody, A. and Tate, D. (eds), *Geist und Macht* [see note 3 of the Introduction], 23-34 (here 29).

supporter of socialism by remaining faithful to her political ideal, and as a writer by not renouncing her critical responsibilities. In other words, this is the way in which she turned literature into a 'konstruktiver Beitrag'²² to the realisation of the socialist utopia.²³

3.2.2 Dignity as a Pillar of Society

With regard to literature understood as a 'konstruktiver Beitrag', it is interesting to note that in order to contribute through her work to the fulfilment of the socialist utopia, during the GDR era Königsdorf approached the development of society very critically, focusing in particular on those societal mechanisms and attitudes going against the idea of human dignity (*Würde*). By analysing how she employs the concept of dignity as a yardstick to evaluate the GDR's progress, it will be possible to define more clearly her identity as an intellectual in pursuit of her political aspirations within the context of her fiction. Especially in view of the fact that dignity appears connected to many other themes, the analysis of this concept illustrates Königsdorf's attentive observation of various aspects of society. Given her strong scientific background, her most obvious preoccupation is that the respect for human dignity should become a point of reference for the development of scientific research. Other areas which she takes into consideration are the dignity of the generation who experienced the Second World War, the theme of dignity and illness, a personal concern of the author in view of the fact that she suffers from Parkinson's disease, and individual resistance to opportunism and utilitarian thinking.

Another very important aspect of Königsdorf's focus on the idea of dignity is the fact that it remains constant throughout her literary production. As a consequence, it forms the main link between her pre-1989

²² See Schmidt, C., *Rückzüge und Aufbrüche* [see note 51 of Chapter 1], 21.

²³ This idea is discussed within the literary context of *Respektloser Umgang* in section 5.2.1.

short stories and novels and her non-fictional writings of the ‘peaceful Revolution’. This shows that after 1989 Königsdorf did not have to renounce her past ideas; on the contrary, the events of 1989-90 gave her the opportunity to move them from their fictional context and develop them further in essays and articles. For this reason, the analysis of the concept of dignity in Königsdorf’s pre-1989 works will be followed by the discussion of how during the ‘peaceful Revolution’ she referred back to it in order to explain the dynamics underlying GDR society, and subsequently turned it into the principle according to which, in her view, East Germany should have been reformed.

3.2.2.1 The Concept of Dignity in Königsdorf’s Pre-1989 Fiction

One of the first works in which Königsdorf introduces the concept of dignity is *Respektloser Umgang*. After illustrating the destructive power of science through the examples of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and showing how science was again being misused during the Cold War, she presents dignity as one of the basic principles which should regulate the development of scientific research as well as the use to which scientific discoveries are put.²⁴ In this novel, Königsdorf also explores this idea in the context of the personal life of the protagonist, who, following a self-reassessment process, in which she learns to respect herself and others, can face death with dignity.

Through the main character of *Respektloser Umgang* she broaches an important theme, that of death and dying as involving a loss of dignity, which she deepens with the discussion of the first-person narrator’s experience in ‘Der Rummelplatz’, the melancholy tale concluding *Lichtverhältnisse*.²⁵ In a few pages, Königsdorf tells about the fears of a

²⁴ In this chapter, the relationship between science and the respect for human dignity is only briefly mentioned, as I dealt with it in more detail in section 2.2.3.1.

²⁵ The descriptions of the hospital environment, the refusal of the doctors to be open and honest with their patients, the growing fears coming from not knowing one’s real conditions, remind me of Maxie Wander’s diary and letters which she wrote before dying of cancer in 1977. I have

woman who is about to die and about her hostile surroundings. In the hospital, she feels treated 'wie ein unfolgsames Haustier' (LV, 162). The nurses and the doctors are unable to deal with her as a person, and fuel her fears by refusing to discuss her imminent death, because '[n]iemand ist gewöhnt, darüber zu reden' (LV, 162). Not even her daughter seems to be able to offer her some compassion. For instance, she tries to be always in a good mood in order to hide the uneasiness she is experiencing vis-à-vis the seemingly lifeless figure in front of her.

The dying woman fights her fears by imagining a fairground being built outside the hospital. Even though she knows that it is a fabrication of her mind, it is nevertheless important that she keeps believing in it. As the fairground is a symbol of joy and vitality, contrasting with the coldness and sterility of the hospital, the thought of it makes her last days more bearable. In the end, in spite of these constant humiliations, she understands how she can die with dignity by realising that:

[...] es ist eine Lüge, daß der Tod das Ende ist. Der Tod hat nichts mehr mit mir zu tun. Er ist sinnlos und grausam. Aber am Ende steht das Leben. Dieses letzte bißchen Leben, dem der Tod seinen besonderen Wert verleiht und das wie ein Tropfen verrinnt. (LV, 171)

She is not the only figure in *Lichtverhältnisse* indicating Königsdorf's growing concern with the concept of dignity. As Margy Gerber²⁶ points out, the protagonist of 'Sachschaden' as well as Alfred Stiller in 'Polymax' and Rudolf Knack in 'Kugelblitz' are characters who try to live with

different reasons for believing that Wander might have influenced Königsdorf. For example, Königsdorf could have received one of the last letters sent by Maxie Wander. See the letter sent to Helga, B., Berlin (B. could stand for Bunke, Königsdorf's married name) on 16.08.1977, in Wander, M., *Leben wär' eine prima Alternative: Tagesbuchaufzeichnungen und Briefe* (Darmstadt; Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1981), 207-208, first published in 1978. This would not be surprising, as the two had met each other when Helga Königsdorf provided one of the interviews for Wander's volume *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*. Königsdorf's indebtedness to Wander is also shown by the fact that she borrows the title of Wander's collection of documents before her death *Leben wär' eine prima Alternative* for one of her essays and paraphrases it into *Überleben wäre eine prima Alternative*.

²⁶ See Gerber, M., 'Impertinence, Productive Fear and Hope: The Writings of Helga Königsdorf' [see note 27 of the Introduction], 191-192.

dignity. For example, in 'Sachschaden'²⁷ the female protagonist is the only one expressing some real concern for a young boy who runs into a car with his moped. While everybody else seems to pay attention only to the cost of the damage, she shows a spark of human kindness by caring for the boy. The other character, who struggles to preserve his dignity in his profession, is the serious journalist Alfred Stiller, whose honesty unfortunately clashes with the interests of the editors, ready to turn any news into a sensation. And finally, Rudolf Knack is a scientist who, when forced to abandon the institute because of his unusual methods, continues to believe in his ideas. For this reason, he has to resort to carrying out his experiments in his small flat, with only the help of his wife and at his own expense. Unfortunately, the prejudices which caused his isolation disappear only after his death, when his talent is finally recognised.²⁸

Apart from the delicate relationship between science and dignity, which in *Ungelegener Befund* is brought to the fore through the main protagonist, Dieter Jhanz, who is an expert in genetics, in this novel the theme of dignity is also analysed in the context of the Second World War. In particular, here Königsdorf focuses on the fact that the people who returned from the Second World War were condemned to go through life with their horrible secrets, as they were never given the chance to rehabilitate themselves and therefore recover their dignity as human beings.²⁹

Through Dieter, Königsdorf shows that, despite the arrogant assumption of belonging to a better generation, once he acknowledges his conformist attitude, he has to come to terms with the fact that he might have

²⁷ I also dealt with 'Sachschaden' in section 1.7.

²⁸ For a more extensive discussion of the short stories 'Kugelblitz' and 'Polymax', see section 2.2.2.

²⁹ Königsdorf also draws attention to this problem through the figure of Frau Franz in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, which I discuss in section 5.3.1.3.

ended up conforming, like his father did, to the Nazi regime.³⁰ Thus, he understands that the refusal of his generation to deal with the horrors of nazism not only caused their fathers' loss of dignity, but also their own, since their arrogance impeded them from forgiving their parents' generation for their mistakes instead of trying to learn from their experience.³¹ It is as a consequence of the discovery that '[v]ielleicht haben sie, haben wir, nie so etwas wie Würde entwickelt' (UB, 100) that Dieter calls for a new beginning after breaking the silence surrounding uncomfortable past events.

3.2.2.2 Königsdorf's Concept of Dignity in Her Non-Fictional Writings of 1989-90

This first exploration of the difficulty of preserving one's dignity within the context of the GDR society prepares the terrain for her later examination of the reasons why the SED regime deprived its citizens of their dignity, which she carries out in her non-fictional work *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen*, and especially in the article 'Was nun?'.³² Such an analysis is part of the attempt to understand the past, and not simply disregard it or demonise it. As Königsdorf realises in *Ungelegener Befund*, the refusal to deal with what happened during the Second World War caused a loss of dignity and of precious experience for the whole of society. Hence, by her discussion of the mechanisms on which the GDR was based, she is trying to avoid another rupture between historical eras of the kind which many people allowed to occur after 1945.

Paradoxically, when *Ungelegener Befund* was published in 1990, she was no longer part of the 'better' generation struggling to disassociate themselves from their fathers' past. The 'peaceful Revolution' had in fact also the effect of transforming the image of the 'middle generation' from

³⁰ I also discussed Dieter Jhantz's conformist attitude in sections 1.8 and 2.2.3.2.

³¹ In section 5.3.1.3, I also point out that by refusing to deal with Nazism the 'middle generation' failed to provide the younger generation with a link to the past of their country.

³² See DC, 12-18. This article was first published in *Neues Deutschland*, February 1990.

that of the pioneers who embraced socialism in order to defeat fascism into that of the supporters of an undemocratic regime. Hence, at this time she was one of those involved; she belonged to the group of the 'Gläubigen',³³ who suppressed their doubts because they wanted to believe in their society at all costs. It is therefore thanks to her investigation of the past that she could put into practice what she discusses in her novel and initiate a dialogue in order to prevent a new set of myths being created about the GDR. In this manner, she also maintains her own dignity by honestly talking about her experience while providing future generations with an invaluable history lesson.³⁴

According to Königsdorf's analysis in 'Was nun?', the socialist regime had to devote all its resources to the preservation of the power of the few at the top because it was not legitimised by an original consensus. Consequently, all the other aspects of governing a country, for example the functioning of the economy, were subservient to this political aim. The main method employed to maintain the status quo was to subordinate and humiliate the majority of the citizens, thus depriving them of their dignity. In Königsdorf's words: 'Das Herrschaftsprinzip dieses feudalen Systems bestand in der Demütigung des Menschen' (DC, 15).

This humiliation was mainly achieved by not giving the people the necessary space to develop their potential. As is often the case in Königsdorf's short stories about the scientific environment, whenever creative ideas were put forward, they were immediately treated as suspicious and eventually dismissed. In many instances, she presents

³³ This is how she describes herself in the text 'Menschenwürde oder Der Schlaf der Vernunft' in MS, 58-79 (here 60).

³⁴ In Chapter 5, I point out how the novels *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* can also be seen as a very precious history lesson as they offer an insight into the daily life of the new federal states in the aftermath of unification from an Eastern German perspective. See section 5.3.1.3.

situations in which the formula for success is based on adapting oneself passively, without disrupting the routine.³⁵

The suspicion surrounding creativity was not just a feature of the scientific environment. In her later reflections, Königsdorf realises that the intellectuals were the only ones within society who were satisfied with their work. According to her, since the rest of the workers were treated as cheap labour, and therefore deprived of their sense of self-worth, this was the real privilege the intellectuals enjoyed: 'Das wichtigste Privileg aber war, daß die Intellektuellen mit ihrer Arbeit voll identifiziert waren (MS, 119).

Königsdorf identifies other elements which contributed to eroding the self-confidence of the people. For instance, she mentions the suppression of freedom of speech. As a result of the state control over the mass media, the citizens were kept unaware of the real problems faced by their country. In her view, this monopoly over information clearly indicates the government's unwillingness to harness the creativity of its own citizens in its search for solutions to their common concerns. Furthermore, since the very undemocratic resistance of the SED to any serious involvement of ordinary citizens in the running of the country resulted in the impossibility of the latter exercising their right to self-determination, this led to a sense of powerlessness with regard to their fate and the loss of their sense of responsibility. It is then evident that citizens who do not have access to the necessary information, and above all are not encouraged to make their own decisions, cannot but lose their dignity.

³⁵ See for example the discussion of the short story 'Kugelblitz', included in LV, 5-32, and of 'Der unangemessene Aufstand des Zahlographen Karl-Egon Kuller', part of LD, 51-67. While the protagonist of 'Kugelblitz' is a paradigm of a scientist who believes in the power of his imagination to make scientific discoveries, Dr. Kuller is the exact opposite. He has built a career for himself by being careful in his research not to disrupt the 'system'. These two stories are examined in sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.

From a certain point of view, the intellectuals, especially those of Königsdorf's generation, indirectly helped the government, through their subservience to the socialist ideology, to deprive the GDR citizens of their dignity. Königsdorf is aware of this. This is the reason why in the aftermath of the Revolution she faced up to the question of complicity and responsibility and tried to accept the failure of the intellectual class in indulging an undemocratic system and lacking the courage to examine deeply their beliefs. This passive acceptance of the totalitarian regime was among the main accusations³⁶ made against Eastern German intellectuals during 1989-90, for in this fashion they continuously contributed to the legitimisation of the GDR. In this regard, Günter Kunert remarked that during the Cold War this was true for both the Eastern and Western German intellectuals:

Waren sie zu jenem Zeitpunkt entweder nach Deutschland heimgekehrte Emigranten oder Mitläufer Hitlers oder wenigstens sich abseits Haltende gewesen, so wurde ihnen nun eine Position zugewiesen, die sie noch nie inne gehabt hatten: Sie mutierten zu offiziellen Vertretern und Verteidigern des von ihnen jeweils gewählten Systems. Damit aber hoben die Systeme, sonst kulturell eher unbedarft, ihre "Dichter und Denker" aufs Podest, um sich durch sie legitimieren und die höheren geistigen Weihen verleihen zu lassen.³⁷

Another aspect of the role played by the intellectuals which undermined the dignity of the GDR people is the fact that, in undertaking the function of the spokespersons for the citizens, in order to mediate between the Party and the people, they blunted the critical abilities of the latter. On the one hand, in the longer run this mechanism had the advantage of conferring special authority on the intellectuals, who, for this reason, felt needed and loved. On the other hand, some authors saw the readers' uncritical attitude as a

³⁶ In a text entitled 'Wer sich ändert, bleibt sich treu', Wolf Biermann observed in this regard that intellectuals in the GDR had sold themselves into subservience to an ideology, and that '[s]elber in feineren Fesseln, schmieden sie grobe Ketten fürs Volk'. This text is part of the collection *Über das Geld und andere Herzensdinge: Prosaische Versuche über Deutschland* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1991), 51-71 (here 54). It first appeared in *Die Zeit*, 24.08.1990.

³⁷ Kunert, G., 'Der Sturz vom Sockel' in *Der Sturz vom Sockel* (Munich; Wien: Hanser, 1992), 68-72 (here 69). This text was also published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 03.09.1990.

failing for which they were partly responsible.³⁸ Königsdorf also analyses this relationship between readers and writers, and the conclusion she reaches highlights a further aspect of the situation. While she does not deny having enjoyed the reassuring feeling of being needed, she also stresses the less positive implication of this role. The high level of expectations placed on the intellectuals by the public could in fact be experienced as a very oppressive burden, as illustrated by her comment:

Mißbraucht wurden wir von den Lesern, die uns als Vorhut in die Schlacht schickten, die unsere Geschichten nicht als Geschichten, sondern als Offenbarungen lasen. Die vorgaben, es wären Offenbarungen, um sich selbst nicht offenbaren zu müssen. (DC, 81)

Beyond the cultural dimension, Königsdorf points out other reasons why so many citizens, including the writers, put up with the SED regime. For instance, in order to explain the blindness vis-à-vis the wrongs of the Party, Königsdorf observes that for many people, especially those of her generation, the Party came to assume a parental role: 'Die Partei war Vater und Mutter' (DC, 13). This role explains the use of expressions such as 'Ich liebe euch alle', attributed to Erich Mielke,³⁹ which reveal the relationship of the Party playing the role of the loving parent and firm guidance with the citizens, seen as small children needing affection.

In this regard, it is also important to understand that the specificity of the historical period of post-war Germany was one of the factors which

³⁸ The latter include Christoph Hein who stated: 'Die unkritische Haltung huldigt dem kenntnisreichen Wissenschaftler oder dem begabten Poeten, und mit der Huldigung verkürzt sie das eigene kritische Bewußtsein bis zur Selbstaufgabe. Dann wird die Schrift des Bewunderten ein Glaubensartikel. Versuchen wir dieses Dilemma zu negieren, zu leugnen, werden wir sein Opfer', in Hein, C., *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen: Essays und Reden* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1990), 118.

³⁹ On 13 November 1989, in his farewell speech to the Parliament, Erich Mielke, the powerful head of the Stasi, addressed the audience with the term 'Genossen' ('comrades'). As somebody made him aware that the people he was in front of were not all 'Genossen', he replied: 'Verzeihung, das ist doch nur eine natürliche menschliche Sache. Das ist doch eine formale Frage. Ich liebe doch alle, alle Menschen!'. After this episode, Mielke's sentence was shortened into 'Ich liebe euch alle!', an expression used to indicate the parenting role assumed by the Party in its relationship with the citizens. Cited by Wolle, S., *Die heile Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR, 1971-1989* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), 126.

helped the Party to take on its guiding role. After the trauma of the war, people were completely disorientated. In socialism they found the only force which had offered resistance against the Nazi regime, and hence a new cause which gave them a goal and a sense of security in the post-war climate of uncertainty. In other words, in the Party many citizens found their home (DC, 12), the place where they felt loved and protected.⁴⁰

In the article 'Was nun?', Königsdorf also describes the parenting role played by the Party on an economic level as shown by the fact that the state penetrated into peoples' daily life with the help of a very strong welfare system, which also had the function to compensate for the lack of legitimacy on which the GDR had been built. Through welfare state provisions, the SED regime fulfilled the citizens' needs, thus hoping to ensure their loyalty and make them dependent. It was not by chance that the GDR media continuously stressed the social security enjoyed by the people in Eastern Germany and especially the fact that they were all guaranteed employment.

In the same article, Königsdorf also discusses the psychological implications of the Party's strategy to make the citizens subservient to it thanks to its ability to appeal to such a basic need as that of being cared for and to belong. So strong is the human need for love and security that nothing was more feared than the loss of these feelings. Hence, the readiness of many people to trust the Party, to accept compromises and restrictions, to the point of being deprived of their own dignity, has to be understood in the light of this fear.

To complete her analysis, Königsdorf presents the positive implications of the citizens' loss of dignity for the aim of preserving power.

⁴⁰ See also section 4.2.2, in which I develop the idea that for many citizens, including Königsdorf, the Party represented their home.

If we assume that dignity and self-determination are strictly linked, then we come to the conclusion that somebody who has not got any dignity cannot but be grateful to the controlling institution for making all the decisions on his/her behalf. At the same time, the institution appears to be taking over the citizens' responsibilities in order to help them to cope with something beyond their capabilities, and can in this way justify the suppression of freedom as an act of love. Thus, the impossibility of exercising one's self-determination is experienced in this political framework not as a restriction of one's own freedom, but as a relief for the individual who does not need to assume any kind of responsibility for his/her own actions. The comfort of hiding behind a conception of society based on the collective 'we' is one of the main elements which, according to Königsdorf, allowed the GDR to last as long as forty years.

Königsdorf also makes the point that the people at the top too ended up losing their dignity as a result of the way in which they had exercised their power. According to her, 'Würde ist immer auch Würde der anderen' (MS, 99), meaning that you cannot take away somebody's dignity without losing yours in the process. If this is true, then, in Königsdorf's opinion, this could be one of the reasons why the state leadership did not take any pride in carrying out their task properly and let their country go bankrupt morally and economically.

How then do we explain the Revolution of 1989, when people recovered their lost dignity and initiated the reform process? First of all, as a general observation, it can be stated that even an unpopular government may be endured because of the benefits and opportunities it provides, or because its citizens cannot visualise an alternative. Only in 1989 did an achievable alternative emerge, embodying Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*. Secondly, it does not seem possible in the long term to prevent citizens

from re-asserting their sense of human dignity. Figgis has put this point well:

In theory [the state] represents a despot ruling over slaves; in practice even a despot is limited by the fact that slaves are, after all, human; deny their personality as you like, there comes a point at which it asserts itself, and they will kill either the despot or themselves.⁴¹

Königsdorf's analysis of the mechanisms which allowed the SED regime to deprive its citizens of their dignity does not only show that she wants to learn from her GDR experience, but also serves her as a reference point for the reform of society. In fact, when the Revolution broke out and the opportunity to create a new society seemed suddenly very close, she once more suggested the idea of dignity as the criterion determining how to introduce changes. In the essay entitled 'Das Prinzip Menschenwürde',⁴² published in the autumn of 1989, she formulates this concept in precise terms as a categorical imperative on which the new ethics should be based:

Prinzip Menschenwürde: Handle so und trage Sorge, daß so gehandelt wird, daß die Wirkungen dieser Handlungen für gegenwärtiges und künftiges menschliches Leben, betreffen sie dich selbst, mit deiner Würde vereinbar wären. (MS, 25)

In the light of the risks contained in scientific progress and economic developments, which could be easily turned against the interests of mankind, she proposes that the principle of human dignity ('Menschenwürde') be established and supported by a checklist ('Fragenkatalog') aimed at the 'Sicherung von menschenwürdigen Bedingungen' (MS, 26). According to her, this should prevent the new society from repeating the mistakes of the past, and contribute to the creation of a society qualitatively superior to its predecessor. Therefore, as she hopes that reforms will soon be implemented, she suggests that

⁴¹ Figgis, J. N., *Churches in the Modern State* cited by Miller, J. D. B., *The Nature of Politics* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1962), 149.

⁴² This article is part of MS, 23-29 and was first published in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, October 1989.

innovations, whether of a political, cultural or economic nature, should be approved only when compatible with the above-mentioned checklist.

3.3 The Years 1989-90: Königsdorf's Re-assessment of Her Identity as an Intellectual

The period from the 'peaceful Revolution' to unification is the most interesting within Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual because it kept on evolving. From the first phase of enthusiasm in which she was convinced that she could contribute to the realisation of her political goals to the period following the March elections in which she gave up her political identity, she was constantly up-dating her positions. In the following sections, it is my intention to analyse Königsdorf's steady progression into a non-fictional writer as she made the transition from being a politically committed intellectual in the GDR to having to operate within unified Germany. In order to do so, I have divided my analysis into four main phases. The first two stages take place during the Revolution and include Königsdorf's enthusiastic contribution to reforming the country, which at that point in time she erroneously believed was going to be possible, and her process of re-appraisal, in which she examined the role she played during the GDR. These first two phases are followed by the March elections of 1990, which put an end to the reformist hopes brought about by the Revolution. I will then deal with how, after this date, she tried to re-establish touch with her readership by giving them the opportunity to express their views on the GDR and their experiences during the 'peaceful Revolution'. Finally, I will investigate the impact of the elections on her intellectual identity, as this was the time when she gave up the political aspect of it. This last phase sees the end of the co-existence of Königsdorf's political and intellectual identities, which she first conceived as complementary, then tried to separate, before concluding that they were incompatible within the new society.

3.3.1 1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit: between Hope and Commitment

The material gathered in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* illustrates Königsdorf's intellectual contribution to the 'peaceful Revolution', covering the period from November 1987 to March 1990. The particularity of this work consists of the fact that it is a collage of articles, personal and open letters, political speeches and poems, besides being a chronicle of the political events of the Revolution. Thus, it presents a network of connections between the private and the public, the political and the personal self, which reflects Königsdorf's experiences as an intellectual, party member and citizen in that eventful period.

Here it becomes clear that she belonged to the 'reformists', the group of GDR intellectuals who, in this climate of political dissatisfaction, tried to seize the opportunity to bring the socialist dream close to realisation. As in the first phase of the Revolution Königsdorf believed that she could contribute to laying the basis for the new society, which, she hoped, would soon replace the SED regime, she started a frenetic period of intellectual activity. The remarkable aspect of her writings in which she puts forward her suggestions on how to reform society, is that she does not restrict herself to the cultural or the scientific spheres, which are her areas of expertise. On the contrary, she extends her propositions also to the realms of economics and politics. According to Elizabeth Mittman,⁴³ the fact that she is able to define the responsibilities for each one of these dimensions partly explains Königsdorf's ability to keep talking in a time when the GDR culture and its representatives were being discredited. This involvement with different areas of society remains a feature of her non-fictional writings. This is evident in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, in which the various essays illustrate her economic, political, and cultural ideas for improving the current situation.

⁴³ See Mittman, E., 'Locating a Public Sphere' [see note 28 of the Introduction].

As I am mainly interested in the evolution of Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual in 1989-90, I will focus on her thoughts regarding the cultural sphere, and precisely on the importance she attributes to critical thinking, which she sees as the first condition to ensure that human dignity is properly respected. Critical thinking is crucial to the whole question of dignity as it enhances creativity. Through the use of their creative potential people are given a chance to help towards the solution to common problems. This opportunity to contribute to the making of society gives them the feeling of living in a dignified way.

This progression from critical thinking to creativity, and from creativity to dignity can take place only when citizens receive thorough information on their real situation. In this context, Königsdorf clearly refers to the reform of the media, the new task of which she describes as 'umfassend und rückhaltlos zu informieren' (MS, 74). This is only the first phase of a theory which also includes the readiness of the citizens to assume responsibility for themselves and, on the basis of the information received, to participate in the development of their own country. In this framework, literature as well has a role to play in providing the terrain for the promotion of critical thinking. In Königsdorf's words:

[Literatur] kann mit Möglichkeiten spielen und Modelle für das Beurteilen von Wirklichkeit anbieten. Mit ihrer Sensibilität für Erscheinungen kann sie auf alle Probleme der Welt schnell reagieren. Sie kann also vorpreschen und unbequem sein. [...] Literatur kann aufklärerische Funktion übernehmen, indem sie kulturelle Erfahrungen mit Risiken anbietet, indem sie das Allzugroße, das der Mensch nicht mehr sinnlich erfassen kann, nachvollziehbar im kleinen widerspiegelt. Literatur kann der Entmündigung des Menschen entgegenwirken, indem sie sein Gefühl für Würde und Verantwortung stärkt. (MS, 78-79)

This statement clearly indicates that during the 'peaceful Revolution' Königsdorf did not radically change her idea of literature. On the one hand she welcomed the fact that literature could at last cast off the function of replacing journalism - the so-called *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion* -, which it

had been forced to take on in the GDR.⁴⁴ On the other hand, it is also true that she remained attached to the notion of committed literature, which continues to be at the base of both her fictional and non-fictional works also after unification, becoming in this way one of the main elements of continuity marking the whole of her writing career.⁴⁵

This strong sense of commitment, which Königsdorf felt towards her readers, is also the reason why she decided to put together this collage. Her intention was to leave a document to posterity, in which not only the facts, but also the feelings that accompanied the 'peaceful Revolution' could be sampled. She was in fact afraid that those who in the future will take an interest in this historical period would only find: 'Akten oder modernere Dokumentationen', and that '[s]ie werden entdecken, daß wir unsere Meinung änderten, aber sie werden nichts von dem Schmerz erfahren, [...] [n]ichts wird da geschrieben sein von unserer Einsamkeit, von unserer Angst. Von unserem Glück' (MS, 5). Therefore, from this perspective, *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* can be read as Königsdorf's attempt to offer future generations a more personalised picture of the events of 1989-90.

3.3.2 The Revolution as a Period of Re-appraisal

Apart from being a very exciting period, in which Königsdorf felt full of ideas and energy, the Revolution was for her also a time of re-appraisal. In

⁴⁴ The fact that in this period Königsdorf believes that literature should no longer play the role of replacing journalism is specifically related to the Revolution. See also note 37 of the Introduction. In section 3.4.3 I discuss the fact that after unification she seems to be still convinced of the inadequacy of the media, to which she tries to put a remedy through her works. This point is also raised in section 5.3.1.1, in which I analyse the reasons why the novels *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* still contain traces of the so-called *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion*.

⁴⁵ In the section 3.4.2 I discuss the work *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*. Here Königsdorf's sense of commitment is related to the fact that she assumes the role of the conscience of modern society by urging her readers to become aware of the consequences which modern lifestyle could have on the health of the planet. In section 5.3.1.4, I point out that *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* can be read as examples of the ideal of literature providing aid to living (*Lebenshilfe*), which is therefore another aspect of Königsdorf's commitment towards her readership. Another work which also seems to have this function is *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, which is presented in section 3.4.3.

an article significantly entitled 'Menschenwürde oder Der Schlaf der Vernunft',⁴⁶ she describes how the Revolution put her life into question and made her realise the fact that she had allowed the regime, at least to a certain extent, to walk over her sense of dignity as a human being. The demands which the system placed on its citizens, the repressive measures it used to preserve its power, the contradiction of a ruling class betraying the very ideals it pretended to embody, appeared to her in all their absurdity in October 1989. Not only did the Revolution give Königsdorf the hope that socialism was finally possible, but, perhaps more importantly, it also brought back her lucidity of mind, her capacity to criticise and judge independently, and above all to think as a rational subject after a long period of lethargy. Only at this time she realised that she had been an accomplice of the undemocratic SED regime because she had chosen to believe what suited her, and refused in this way to acknowledge the truth: 'ich gehöre [...] zu den Mitschuldigen. Zu den Gläubigen, schlimmer, zu denen, die ihre Zweifel zu lange verdrängten, weil sie glauben wollten' (MS, 59-60).

Not surprisingly, this process of profound self-questioning, which was triggered off by a public debate in the Erlöser-Kirche⁴⁷ in Berlin on 28 October 1989 entitled 'Gegen den Schlaf der Vernunft', involves not only her identity as a political citizen, but also as a creative writer. That is how she comments on her writings:

Trotzdem blieb es eine Kunstwelt, in der zwar jede Figur etwas von mir hatte, aber doch niemals ich war, sondern bereits ein repariertes Ich. Wußte ich das nicht immer? Was hatte ich noch alles gewußt? Gewußt und verdrängt. Alle meine Figuren, selbst die Schurken, besaßen etwas wie Würde. Ich aber, lebte ich mit meinem Gefühl für Würde in Einklang? (MS, 58)

⁴⁶ See MS, 58-79. This text was first published in *Wochenpost*, 17.11.1989.

⁴⁷ This was a meeting which had been organised by writers and artists to give the opportunity to those who had been caught up in the events of 7 October (the day in which the official celebrations at the Palace of the Republic in Berlin were overshadowed by the mass demonstrations outside) to talk about their experience. Many participants made public their own experiences of violence and imprisonment. All discussed ways of finding a way forward.

In this respect, one can easily recognise this compensatory function in many of Königsdorf's fictional figures of her pre-1989 works. There are many instances, in which her characters, normally after an intense psychological process, win back their dignity. According to Claudia Schmidt's analysis, the fact of attributing such a compensatory function to literature was a reaction to the stagnation of the GDR, where no attempt was being made to revitalise its political culture. This explains the effort of some critical authors such as Königsdorf to keep alive the hope of the possibility of change through their works in which they constructively criticised the system in order to encourage improvement. As a result, literature became a surrogate for the lack of opportunities to impact on the reality of the country and a 'Projektionsraum [...], in den eine Gesellschaft ihre Träume delegierte'.⁴⁸

In the light of Königsdorf's discovery that she had too often hidden behind what she defines 'ein repariertes Ich' (MS, 58), it is easy to see how her characters as well reflect this difficulty of distinguishing reality from fantasy. An example in this regard is offered by the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang*, who goes through a process of self-reappraisal to recover her dignity while she is under the effect of strong hallucinatory medicaments. When she hallucinates, she imagines making the acquaintance of the late Lise Meitner.⁴⁹ The 'disrespectful' - and purely imaginary - dialogue in which she engages with the famous scientist is one of the factors helping her to understand the meaning of her life, thus blurring the distinctions between fantasy and reality. Similarly, Dieter Jhanz of *Ungelegener Befund*, who is also an example of having the courage to face up to the truth in order to carry on living with dignity, does

⁴⁸ See Schmidt, C., *Rückzüge und Aufbrüche*, 21.

⁴⁹ When she believes she sees Lise Meitner sitting with her at the cafeteria of her institute, she says: 'Bisher glaubte ich, Realwelt und Halluzination gegeneinander abgrenzen zu können. Wie aber weiter, wenn die Wesen meiner Phantasie mit dem, was ich meine objektiv existierende Umwelt nenne, Kontakt aufnehmen, ohne mich als Medium zu benötigen' (RU, 38-39). At this stage, it is clear she is losing control over her mind.

not conceal his difficulty in maintaining a sense of reality. In one of those letters intended for Felix, but which he does not send, he says: ‘Welch ein Durcheinander! Wo ist die Grenze zwischen Traum und Realität?’ (UB, 14).

In the short stories as well, she presents dreams and reality not as separate, but as complementary dimensions. Especially in *Meine ungehörigen Träume*, dreams are employed as the medium to gain ‘höhere Erkenntnisse und Wahrheiten über andere und uns selbst’,⁵⁰ and hence to have a clearer picture of reality.⁵¹ To cite an example, the story ‘Die Nacht beginnt am Tag’⁵² tells about the loneliness of a woman sharing her life with a man who is unaware of her dissatisfaction. Her inner malaise keeps her awake at night, when, in a dreamlike state, she imagines herself flying, talking to a nightingale, and then falling into emptiness. In the end, she will find her happiness, ironically symbolised by a pair of wings, which will allow her to fly during the day as well. The message of the story is clear: although the solution to our problems depends entirely on us, dreams can nevertheless help us to cope with our worries and guide us into the right direction.

After the confusion with regard to the relationship between appearance and reality in the GDR, *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* can therefore be read as a reflection of Königsdorf’s desire to achieve authenticity and transparency both on a personal and historical level. By ordering official and personal documents chronologically, she tried to produce an account of the events of 1989-90, in which the listing of the political events is humanised and made more authentic by their interconnection with her intimate writings. As an account of a state in

⁵⁰ Grunenberg, A., ‘Träumen und Fliegen: Neue Identitätsbilder in der Frauenliteratur der DDR’ [see note 33 of Chapter 1], 158.

⁵¹ I discussed the role of dreams more thoroughly in section 1.3.2 and briefly in section 1.4.

⁵² This story is part of MT, 94-103.

which the truth was often twisted to serve the political ideology of the SED, this book can be seen as Königsdorf's answer to the questions about the GDR and its collapse, which the next generation will inevitably ask. This interpretation seems to be justified by the fact that in her two pre-1989 novels, *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*, she shows how the fascist past of Germany, despite the fact that in both Germanies it was buried or distorted, comes back to haunt the younger generations, which are tormented by the need to know what really happened in those years.

The last stage of this fusion of fiction and reality is the Revolution, when the GDR intellectuals, according to Königsdorf, 'die Wirklichkeit zu [ihrem] Kunstwerk machen wollten' (DC, 34). The interesting possible consequence of the problematic relationship of reality and fiction is that while during the GDR era the many fantastic elements in her work made her part of that literary current inspired by Irmtraud Morgner's experimentation with myths and fairy tales,⁵³ the world of fantasy plays a very marginal role in Königsdorf's post-1990 fiction. Furthermore, after the Revolution she continued to write non-fiction. This decision to carry on writing newspaper articles and essays - some of which are collected in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* - can therefore be seen as Königsdorf's attempt to keep up her alertness vis-à-vis the development of society. In this fashion, she can also more easily apply her critical abilities without running the risk of using her fictional characters to compensate for her personal and social non-achievements in the real world.

⁵³ See for example Irmtraud Morgner *Hochzeit in Kostantinopel* (1968), *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz* (1974) and *Amanda* (1983). I would also like to reiterate that these works were a great source of inspiration to Königsdorf. This is made evident in *Meine ungehörigen Träume* where the protagonist of the eponymous story starts dreaming after reading one of Morgner's stories. For Morgner's influence on Königsdorf, see also section 1.3.2.

3.3.3 An Example of Documentary Literature

Not only was Königsdorf as a writer gripped by the desire to achieve authenticity. The mass protest carried out by the Eastern German citizens in the autumn of 1989 against the lies of the SED regime clearly showed their desire for truth, honesty and openness. After realising that they had lived for many years without the courage to face the truth, many former GDR citizens, including Königsdorf, felt the desire to come out of this intellectual lethargy, to analyse their past behaviour, and to confront their experience.

Their newly found readiness to talk is what most probably gave Königsdorf the inspiration to offer them the opportunity to express themselves freely in print about their experience in the GDR and to articulate their expectations for the future. Following the model of *Gute Morgen, du Schöne*, in the months of July and August 1990, she collected interviews with former GDR citizens, in which they discuss various themes such as life during the GDR - almost all of them describe their attitude to the SED - the events of 1989-90, their dreams for the future and make their first East-West comparisons. This collection of interviews, significantly published on the day of unification under the title *Adieu DDR*, presents eighteen people with very different backgrounds - the range of the interviews she selected includes the former Stasi employee, the young Nazi Skinhead, the priest and the homosexual - talking about themselves. With *Adieu DDR* Königsdorf stepped into the role of the interviewer, and produced for the first time in her literary career a piece of documentary literature. The adoption of this new documentary approach to literature is therefore a further aspect of Königsdorf's evolution as an intellectual during 1989-90.

The preference she gave to such an approach at this particular point in time should not surprise us if we take into account that, beside the fact

that she was familiar with it,⁵⁴ this is also the genre which best suited the transitory character of this period. This was in fact the time when events had revealed the distance separating the aspirations of the intellectuals from those of their readership, and consequently given rise to the need for the former to re-establish touch with the reality of their audience. Without doubt, documentary literature is an optimal point of departure for engaging in a dialogue with the readers and listening to them. It also underlines the fact that Königsdorf was willing to give up her old roles as a moral authority or as a spokesperson for the population. Indeed, the opportunity she gave the interviewees to record their views for posterity demonstrates her desire to acknowledge the newly acquired courage of the citizens to speak for themselves.

3.3.4 The Evolution of the Relationship between Königsdorf's Political and Intellectual Identities in 1989-90

Although the 'peaceful Revolution' represented for Königsdorf a time of profound self-assessment, but also of renewal and experimentation, as shown by the fact that in this period she switched from fiction to more documentary forms, there is nevertheless an aspect of her intellectual identity which remained unaltered until the 1990 elections. I am referring to the fact that throughout the Revolution, she was unwilling to give up her political identity, to the extent of being prepared to stand as a candidate for the PDS. As mentioned above, the co-existence of these two identities had an influence on Königsdorf's work from the beginning of her literary career in the GDR, when, through her criticism of socialism as practised by the SED, she hoped to contribute to the realisation of the socialist utopia. Given that she interpreted the Revolution as an opportunity to realise socialism 'with a human face', this was the time in which her political and intellectual identities coincided most, for she was able to employ her

⁵⁴ Königsdorf collaborated in the making of *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* in the role of an interviewee as discussed in section 1.2.

intellectual voice to promote her political message. Therefore, the result of the elections of 1990 marked for Königsdorf not only the end of the GDR, but also the end of her political dream. In the following paragraphs I will first analyse what kind of literary strategies she adopts in order to maintain her credibility without having to renounce her political ideas during the Revolution. Secondly, I will show how Königsdorf retraces the development of her political identity in the post-unification novel *Gleich neben Afrika*.

3.3.4.1 Königsdorf's Subjective Voice within Her Political Identity

The interesting literary strategy which Königsdorf used to affirm herself as one of the most politically and culturally engaged intellectuals of the 'peaceful Revolution' was to address her audience in a more personal way. While during the GDR era intellectuals had often functioned as mediators between the SED and the people, in her appeals for the renewal of the GDR she spoke exclusively for herself, as is made evident by statements such as: 'Ich spreche hier zu euch nicht im Namen, im Auftrag,... Nein, ich spreche hier in meinem eigenen Namen (MS, 83).

While the adoption of a subjective voice is definitely a sign of Königsdorf's readiness to assume full responsibility for her own actions, it indicates above all her respect for the new sense of self-awareness acquired by the GDR citizens as a result of the Revolution. If she had continued taking for granted a GDR collective identity at a time when the people were showing that they had recovered the ability to speak for themselves, she would have lost all credibility. Instead, she showed that she was aware of this transformation and pleased with it, for it gave her, both as an intellectual and as a politically orientated citizen, like the rest of the GDR population, the possibility of winning back her dignity and starting afresh: 'Erst einmal sind wir vom Sockel gestürzt, auf dem wir zwar dem Wind

ausgesetzt waren, auf dem es sich doch hochgemut stehen ließ. Und dieser Sturz ist gut. Für uns und für die, die uns stürzen' (DC, 9).

The development of Königsdorf's new subjective extra-literary voice certainly matured over time. It is not a coincidence that *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* is introduced by the text of a speech she gave in 1987 entitled 'Von der Schwierigkeit, "Ich" zu sagen',⁵⁵ in which she explains that writing for her implies an intersection, a dynamic dialogue and productive confrontation between 'I' and 'we'. Subsequently, the realisation that her reluctance to expose herself earlier had led her to hide herself behind 'a fictional I' (MS, 58) created the right opportunity for her to start expressing herself in this new, individual fashion.

However, this voice, which first made its appearance during the Revolution, did not develop into a distinguishing feature of Königsdorf's non-fictional work of the years 1989-90. At the turn of the year, as shown by the last texts included in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*, she was already dropping her 'subjective I' and returning to the comforts of a convenient 'we'. As a consequence of the sporadic way in which this voice emerges, it lacks coherence and remains weak. Furthermore, it never becomes clear with which voice Königsdorf is speaking, because she never defines precisely the relationship between her collective and subjective identities. Statements such as the following - 'Denn von den Intellektuellen, von den Andersdenkern also, denkt per Definition ein jeder anders als der andere. Wenn ich also von uns spreche, so meine ich durchweg mich' (DC, 7) - have the effect of blurring the distinction

⁵⁵ This concept is the motif of the novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* by Christa Wolf. The speech was given on the occasion of the Tenth Writers' Congress on 24 November 1987 and later published in MS, 7-9. In a later text, Königsdorf deepens her ideas on subjectivity within the literary context by emphasising that literature does not only reveal the subjectivity of the writer, but also that of the reader: 'Literatur enthüllt nicht nur das Weltgefühl des Autors, sondern in der Reaktion darauf auch etwas von der Wesensart des Lesers. Literatur ist subjektiv in diesem doppelten Sinn ...' (MS, 12). See also section 2.3.

between 'I' and 'we', investing the two identities with a sense of ambiguity and leaving them open to misinterpretations.

Some critics have viewed these constant passages from the collective to the subjective voice and vice versa rather positively. Elizabeth Mittman, for example, remarked that through the collision of the various 'I's' and 'we's' - political, intellectual, etc. - 'she gains [the leverage which] allows her to produce ongoing criticism of the Party and its politics without falling into the aporia of defending/blaming. She is able to talk'.⁵⁶ While this might be true, it is nevertheless important to point out that any incoherence in this respect endangers Königsdorf's credibility in wanting to assume greater responsibility than she was previously prepared to accept. As she insists on the necessity of 'Ich-Sagen' (DC, 34) in the analysis of one's relationship to the SED regime, it almost seems to be a contradiction every time she takes refuge behind a 'we' identity.

Furthermore, Mittman's statement does not say much about the reasons why Königsdorf eventually went back to her political collective identity. For example, it is interesting to observe that it re-emerged when the disappearance of the GDR was practically a *fait accompli*. As a consequence, it can be interpreted as an expression of her need for solidarity and belonging rather than a literary strategy to continue criticising. Mittman's remarks also do not provide any information about the different meanings of the many 'we's', but only underline the political aspect of Königsdorf's collective identity. Thus, if we take into account for instance the essays in *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen*, it is clear that 'we' assumes various connotations, even within the same text. Perhaps the best example in this context is provided by the article 'Deutschland, wo der Pfeffer wächst',⁵⁷ in which 'we' can either be understood as 'we, the

⁵⁶ Mittman, E., 'Locating a Public Sphere', 31.

⁵⁷ This title refers to an article by Ulrich Greiner in *Die Zeit*, 22.06.1990, where he says: 'Die toten Seelen des Realsozialismus sollen bleiben, wo der Pfeffer wächst'. Königsdorf was not the only

Realsozialisten', 'we, the Germans', 'we, the Eastern Germans' or 'we, the Eastern German intellectuals'. Thus, in the sentence opening the article, 'Ob wir es wahrhaben wollen oder nicht, niemand ist völlig gegen Paradoxien des Gefühls gefeit (DC, 49), 'wir' could refer to the Germans or to a more generic 'we, the people'. A few lines later, in the sentence 'Wenn man uns fragt, warum man geblieben ist und sich korrumpt hat' (DC, 51), the pronoun 'uns' seems to be replacing 'us, the Eastern German intellectuals', while in the sentence 'Und wir kosten nicht nur, wir waren auch und sind noch ein ganz zweckmäßiges Billiglohnland' (DC, 51), 'wir' seems to refer to former GDR citizens. While these ambiguities perhaps reflect the period of transition in which these texts were written, they also impose on the reader the task of deciphering every time who 'we' is, with the consequence that it often remains unclear. This difficulty in keeping 'we' and 'I' separate anticipates the identity crises registered in Eastern Germany after unification, which Königsdorf formulates in the following terms: 'Wer sind wir eigentlich? Wir sind nicht die, die wir zu sein glaubten. Wir sind aber auch nicht die, zu denen man uns abstempeln will. Vielleicht aus Gründen, die wir nicht durchschauen. Wer bin ich? Was meint heute noch mein "Wir"? (DC, 83).

3.3.4.2 The End of the Co-existence of Königsdorf's Political and Intellectual Identities

It was only in the last phase of the Revolution that Königsdorf became aware of the difficulty of combining her political and intellectual identities. In particular, her candidature for the PDS at the elections of 1990 in Baden-Württemberg seems to be the experience which most of all made her realise the contradictions emerging when trying to combine an electoral campaign with some serious and honest intellectual activity. This episode, which

one to re-use this expression. In fact, it can also be found in Volker Braun's poem 'Nachruf' composed in July 1990 which says: 'Und ich kann *bleiben wo der Pfeffer wächst*'. Later, it was entitled 'Das Eigentum'. See Braun, V., *Lustgarten. Preußen: Ausgewählte Gedichte* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), 173.

represents the last stage of Königsdorf's attempt to take an active part in the political life of the country, is narrated in *Gleich neben Afrika*, where it is ironically presented as follows:

Ich bin ganz sicher der einzige Kandidat zu einer Bundestagswahl gewesen, der nicht wußte, um wieviel Geld es dabei ging. Sonst hätte ich doch im Wahlkampf den Leuten nicht erzählt, warum sie mich nicht wählen sollten. Was diese auch prompt nicht taten. (GA, 22)

However, *Gleich neben Afrika* does not only introduce Königsdorf's reflections on her recent political failure. Although she had already undergone a first phase of reappraisal during the Revolution, after her electoral failure she felt the need to focus specifically on the political aspect of her past life. She did so through an autobiographically based protagonist who finds it almost impossible to believe that the socialists, including herself, tried to impose their goals on an unwilling majority and that they acted in this way out of love for mankind. The identity crisis which engulfs her is profound, and the questions hard to answer:

Es mußte ein moralisches Blackout in mir gegeben haben. [...] War mir das wirklich passiert! Hatte ich das Komplizenhafte Augenzwinkern geduldet. Um ein Volk gegen seinen Willen 'glücklich' zu machen. Es auf höchst zweifelhafte Weise zu beglücken. Oder war gar ein sorgsam getarnter Eigennutz im Spiele gewesen? Oder ein peinliches Anlehnungsbedürfnis an die Macht? (GA, 80)

In order to understand how this could happen, Königsdorf retraces her character's relationship to the socialist ideology from the moment in which she first comes into contact with political ideas. For this reason, she describes for example the school environment in which the protagonist's indoctrination begins, when she learns that the communists are those who had 'den rechten Glauben', the thought of which 'machte ihnen notfalls sogar das Sterben für "die Sache" leicht' (GA, 35). These definitions are partly in contrast with her parents' belief that '[es] gab zweierlei Kommunisten. Die einen, die gegen die Nazis gewesen waren, und die anderen, die den Leuten alles wegnahmen' (GA, 36). Overall, the whole

issue of socialism remains for her shrouded in vagueness and ambiguity, resulting from the contradictions between what she learns at school and what she hears at home. Her lack of clarity on the whole issue is reflected by the contrasting feelings which socialism provokes in her, ranging from embarrassment for having been elected spokesperson of some committee to almost religious inspiration, when she compares the 'true' communists to Jesus.⁵⁸

Perhaps the most important aspect of her political education lies not so much in what she learns about socialism but how. While school and home represent divergent views on who the communists actually are, they are of the same opinion in teaching her to assume a conformist attitude vis-à-vis political issues. In the school environment, for example, she very soon becomes aware that to express a certain point of view is to guarantee a good mark: 'Ich lernte, daß es Versprechungen gab, die gute Zensuren einbrachten, die aber niemand ernst nahm. Es bestand keine Gefahr, daß man beim Wort genommen wurde' (GA, 35).⁵⁹

Hence, it should not surprise us to learn that her decision to become a Party member does not follow a phase of questioning, but simply evolves from this kind of education. Her doubts rising from the realisation that

⁵⁸ I discuss the meeting of the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* with her old teacher as the occasion which stimulates her analysis of how she first came into contact with socialism in section 4.3.1.

⁵⁹ The theme of the how children were educated to conform features in many other GDR works. As early as 1969, in her book *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Christa Wolf describes how the non-conformist protagonist of the novel during her teaching career is taught by her students that one has to be opportunistic and ready to accept compromises in order to survive. See Wolf, C., *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (Hamburg: Luchterhand, 1991), 115. Not less disillusioned than Christa T.'s students is Pi, the protagonist of a short story bearing the same title, part of LD, 68-87. Pi has to come to terms with the fact that in the school none of his teachers is really interested in the opinion of the pupils: they only expect students to repeat in their essays what they have been taught. Pi, who at first naively tried to be honest and express his own ideas, was punished for speaking his mind. It does not take long however until he learns that to be successful 'man muß eben rauskriegen, was die von einem hören wollen und sich danach richten' (LD, 85). Another story dealing with the theme of education is 'Der kleine Prinz und das Mädchen mit den holzfarbenen Augen', also part of LD, 187-216. In his meeting with the 'educator' the little prince learns that he can only ask questions to which he himself already knows the answer.

Party members do not correspond to the heroic images that her mind had fabricated are soon dismissed, and socialism is embraced as the right ideology for somebody like her who '[wollte] etwas verändern' (GA, 66). Hence, the fact that she does not consider whether socialism is really the way to bring about change must be seen as a direct consequence of her being educated to conform and repeat parrot-fashion what other people expect to hear.

In the context of this repressive education, the protagonist remembers an apparently banal episode of her childhood, which nevertheless influenced the formation of her personality quite heavily in turning her into an insecure individual, willing to conform. She recalls that a child once gave her some money for a ride on a merry-go-round. The day afterwards her parents forced her to go back to her friend's house, apologise and return the money. In the eyes of the protagonist as a child what had happened, which she had experienced as an act of generosity and desire to share, was turned into an awful crime by her parents. However, despite feeling the unfairness of her parents' reaction, she did not have the courage to rebel against them and ended up obeying.

Such an episode, which in itself is rather insignificant, assumes its importance if seen as the moment in which she stops questioning and challenging, and starts repressing her own feelings because of a fundamental lack of confidence in herself. This is the narrator's final comment in this regard:

Ich bin überzeugt, in solchen Momenten der Kindheit fallen Entscheidungen für ein ganzes Leben. Hätte ich damals den Groschen nicht zurückgebracht, ich wäre ein anderer Mensch geworden. Vielleicht hätte ich meinen Gefühlen mehr getraut. (GA, 52)

These reflections indicate that Königsdorf's political identity is entering its last phase.⁶⁰ Although in the essays contained in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, the suggestions she puts forward might have political implications - for example she presents arguments in favour of decentralisation and internationalisation -,⁶¹ she does so in a political vacuum, with the primary intention of representing the interests of mankind as a whole.

3.4 After Unification: Königsdorf as an Independent but Still Morally Concerned Intellectual

3.4.1 Königsdorf's Views on Unification

In the years after 1990, Königsdorf continued to produce non-fictional material in which she critically commented on what was happening around her. Not surprisingly, one of the first themes she tackles is the impact of unification on the Eastern Germans and on herself, for whom the disappearance of the GDR and with it of the socialist utopia was a deeply painful experience. The sadness, the disappointment and the frustration at the missed opportunity of the Revolution are evident in the way that Königsdorf remarks on the development of the political situation: 'Nach diesem Jahr werden Gedichte unmöglich sein. Nach diesem Jahr wird es keine Liebe und keine Revolution mehr geben. Wenn ich könnte, würde ich den Frühling verbieten' (MS, 5). In contrast to the period of the Revolution, when she inserted some poems dealing with her emotions among the texts in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*, she now avoids lyrical forms of self-expression. The only exception is the poem introducing the essays in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, which is however not

⁶⁰ In section 1.8.2 I argued that the analysis of the political development of the main character in *Gleich neben Afrika* comes across as feeble and lacking coherence when one takes into account her homosexual identity. In fact, while considering her political identity, she never confronts the fact that her sexual choice would have not been accepted within the GDR as homosexuals were in general very strongly discriminated against.

⁶¹ See sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.

personal, but conveys a warning message about the disastrous state of the world.

Yet, this is possibly the moment in which Königsdorf's ability to adapt and transform herself in response to the political developments was at its most visible. Even though the popular vote for unification took the burden of reforming the country away from the intellectuals, she was able to maintain the space in the public sphere which she had conquered for herself during the Revolution. In addition to resisting the temptation to give in to the loss of the feeling of 'being needed', in a time which seemed to mark the failure of the intellectuals and their disappearance from the scene,⁶² she realised that in any kind of society, regardless of its political orientation, there would always be the necessity for public figures to provide an intellectual stimulus. 'Wir werden gebraucht. Gebrauchtwerden deutet immer auf ein Defizit. Sagen wir also: Wir werden wieder gebraucht werden. Leider' (DC, 11).

The many newspaper articles and speeches which she continued to write after the Revolution - from February 1990 to July 1991 - showing how also in this period she was heavily involved in the public debate, are collected in *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen*. These texts still deal with the GDR past and, for the most part, exemplify Königsdorf's personal attempt to come to terms with the failure of the Revolution and with the humiliating aspects of the unification process. In this regard, it is interesting to notice that her reflections about the coming together of the two Germanies gravitate once more around the concept of dignity, or rather the suppression of it, for in her view the process of unification brutally undermined the sense of dignity of many ex-GDR citizens that the Revolution had just restored.

⁶² Wolf Lepenies described this period as 'das Desaster der interpretierenden Klasse', cited by Emmerich, W., *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* [see note 7 of the Introduction], 458.

3.4.1.1 Königsdorf's Analysis of the Impact of Unification on the Dignity of the Eastern German Citizens

After feeling ashamed at having supported an economically inefficient system organised around feudal structures, one of the biggest humiliations faced by the Eastern Germans at the time of unification probably was what Königsdorf defines as 'die Konfrontation mit der eigenen Schwäche' (DC, 45). This refers to the fact that, despite having taken part in a revolution to win back their right to self-determination, on the way to unification they found themselves excluded from the task of shaping the future of the country. On an economic level, because of their unfamiliarity with the capitalist system, they had to put themselves at the mercy of the expertise and the financial resources of the Western Germans. Their already restricted influence was furthermore decreased by the fact that their culture as well was rejected on the grounds that the mentality of the workforce, damaged by socialism, needed to be changed. Their values were often turned into non-values and condemned as immoral. Infrastructures were dismantled, even if they had allowed Eastern German families for decades to adopt a *modus vivendi* of which they were actually proud. Ideas, which some of the former GDR citizens, including Königsdorf, had spent a lifetime trying to realise were ridiculed, their 'Bereitschaft, mitzuarbeiten und Verantwortung zu übernehmen' (MS, 77) regarded with suspicion, and their past often demonised. Even former GDR citizens who had left for the West, like the writer Monika Maron, did not show much sympathy for the pain suffered by the Eastern Germans after the enthusiasms of the Revolution, seeing the body-blow to their sense of dignity as a logical consequence of their past mistakes:

Am wenigsten ertrage ich an meinen ehemaligen Staatsbürgerschaftsgefährten, daß sie glauben, alle Welt sei ihnen etwas schuldig, insbesondere schulde man ihnen ihre Würde. Sie haben scheinbar vergessen, daß viele von ihnen mit ihrer Würde bis vor drei Jahren ziemlich leichtfertig umgegangen sind und sie auf die Art eines Tages verloren haben.⁶³

⁶³ Maron, M., 'Zonophie', in *Nach Maßgabe meiner Begreifungskraft: Artikel und Essays* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1993), 112-20 (here 115).

In her writings, possibly as an attempt to restore the dignity of her fellow citizens, Königsdorf tries to fight back against this attack on the GDR culture by highlighting its positive aspects. For instance, she reminds the readership that the socialist ideology helped to defeat fascism and that, by challenging the earlier forms of capitalism, indirectly contributed to the creation of the social market economy. In more general terms, she also points out that even if a vision is in itself not applicable in real life, it can still be intellectually stimulating.

In her critique of unification, not only does she try to prevent socialism and the GDR culture from being completely discredited, but also attempts to underline that the process of East and West coming together was too often considered simply from an economic and political point of view. The more humane aspect of it, that is the need for human beings, with their experiences and aspirations, to be treated with dignity, seemed to have disappeared into the background. By describing the identity of human beings as the organic sum of all their past experiences, she shows that the pressure brought about by unification on the Eastern Germans to dismiss or even despise their past and adapt themselves to the new society is unreasonable. It would in fact mean the denial of their own identity, everything they had learned and experienced in a lifetime. On the contrary, she argues that this legacy should be regarded as a form of richness rather than a burden: '[...] nichts ist auslöschar, nichts wiederholbar. Er [der Mensch] schleppt alles, was war, wie eine Kette mit sich. Aber es ist nicht nur eine Behinderung, sondern auch der Schatz seiner Erfahrungen' (DC, 84).⁶⁴

One of her reasons for focusing on the implications of unification for individuals in Eastern Germany is her fear that new barriers could be soon

⁶⁴ In section 4.3.2, I explain the importance of the emphasis put by Königsdorf on one's personal experience as the phase in which she starts recovering her self-confidence and stabilising her relationship to the GDR.

created - a phenomenon often referred as the 'wall in the head' - as a reaction to the wave of contempt shown towards GDR culture.⁶⁵ Königsdorf is scared that by damaging the sense of dignity of the Eastern Germans, this could have drastic consequences for the whole nation, and seriously jeopardise the process of East and West coming together, for example by giving rise to nationalistic or racist feelings. In Königsdorf's words:

Wird der Mensch aber ohne Zukunftsaussichten ausgegrenzt und gedemütigt, wird alles, worauf er einst stolz war, herabgewürdigt, wird seine Mentalität nur noch als lächerlich und störend empfunden, weil sie der Durchsetzung der neuen kollektiven Idee, der Effizienz im Weg ist, dann wird das Spuren hinterlassen, die Spuren hervorbringen, die wiederum Spuren hinterlassen. (DC, 85)

In her analysis, Königsdorf singles out one aspect of culture with which the Germans have always been able to identify: the 'Idee von der deutschen Tüchtigkeit' (DC, 93), which she describes as the basis for their feeling of self-worth. This idea is worth mentioning because she presents it as the potential point of departure for the establishment of a new identity within which both East and West Germans could find common ground. She even depicts it as one of the main drives behind the Revolution. According to her, with their rebellion in 1989 the former GDR citizens also wanted to demonstrate that they were fed up with working in an inefficient system and now wanted the opportunity to be able to utilise their efficiency ('Tüchtigkeit'). Unfortunately, this turned out to be another missed opportunity. The attempt to discredit any GDR achievement automatically made the Eastern Germans feel excluded from what should have been a collective idea, but ended up being another source of humiliation.

⁶⁵ See section 5.3.1.3, in which I show Königsdorf's determination to contribute to the battle against the so-called 'wall in the head' with the novels *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*.

3.4.2 *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*: Personal Essays and Literature as a Means of Criticising Modern Civilisation (*Zivilisationskritik*)

Within the context of the evolution of Königsdorf's identity as a non-fictional writer there is another important collection of essays which came out in the years following unification entitled *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*. This needs to be considered, for it clearly demonstrates that the self-assessment phase of her identities as an intellectual and a socialist, which Königsdorf underwent in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* and *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen*, was finally over. Here, she shows she has acquired a certain familiarity with the new society, which allows her to get involved in the discussion of various problems, and not just those regarding the integration of the Eastern Germans into unified Germany, as had been the case up until then. In most of these essays, she returns to some of the themes on which she had focused in her pre-1989 fiction, such as environmentalism and progress, revealing once more her pronounced scientific background.⁶⁶ Other texts are more autobiographically based, she tells about herself and her experiences with life in unified Germany, thus alternating personal and not-so personal texts as in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*.

This work demonstrates that Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual has progressed for two main reasons. Firstly, as I have pointed out above, here she is not solely concerned with the Eastern German problematic, but has broadened her perspective well beyond Germany by tackling themes of global relevance. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, in the personal texts she has the courage to talk about herself without hiding behind a 'fictional I' (MS, 58), as she had done very often in her pre-1989 short stories and novels. Although Königsdorf had frequently introduced autobiographically based characters in her work and published a lot of

⁶⁶ For a discussion of these essays, see section 2.3.1.

personal letters,⁶⁷ these essays are the only example of literature written for a public in which she speaks directly about her experiences.⁶⁸ These are of various kinds, including her relationship to Berlin, a friend re-appearing all of a sudden because he/she is in need of money, a visit to a concentration camp, or Eastern Germans meeting Western Germans abroad.⁶⁹ The most personal of these texts is probably 'Seele auf dem Operationstisch' in which Königsdorf talks for the first time openly about her illness and how this has changed her life (RW, 101-106). Therefore, with this new willingness to write personal texts she seems to have overcome the difficulty she had encountered with the pronouns 'we' and 'I', which I have discussed within the context of her political identity, and to have become much more confident about using her subjective voice.

However, if on the one hand these personal texts show that she has evolved, on the other hand in the essays dealing with current affairs she seems to assign a role to herself very similar to the one she played in her pre-1989 writings. Probably as a consequence of the Rio Conference in 1992 on the theme 'Environment and Development',⁷⁰ which Königsdorf

⁶⁷ Königsdorf's personal letters of the Revolution period are published in *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*. In 1991, Königsdorf also participated in the making of the book *Gute Nacht, du Schöne*, edited by Anne Mudry, which is a collection of former GDR women writers' comments on the events of 1989-90. Königsdorf's contributed to the book through an exchange of letters with the writer Rosemarie Zeplin. See 'Gelöschte Kassetten: Gespräche mit Masken', in Mudry, A. (ed.), *Gute Nacht, du Schöne: Autorinnen blicken zurück* (Frankfurt/M.: Luchterhand, 1991), 78-85. Although the publication of her private letters is certainly a sign that she no longer wants to hide herself, it is my belief that writing in the first person for a public is more exemplary of her desire to learn how to use her subjective voice. In fact, while in the letters the addressee is normally somebody she knows, in these texts she is addressing the whole of her readership and engaging in a dialogue with them, thus showing her willingness to share her experiences.

⁶⁸ The only previous exception of a non-fictional autobiographically based text is 'Thüringen, du mein lieb Heimatland' in which she discusses her journey back to her home region in the aftermath of the 'peaceful Revolution'. This essay was published as part of DC, 35-43. I deal specifically with this text in section 4.3.1.

⁶⁹ The titles of these essays are respectively 'Ostern bleibe ich in Berlin', 25-27, 'Meine Freunde und ich', 51-53, 'Ein Ausflug am Wochenende', 77-79, 'Ein äußerst klärender Vorgang', 95-97. These texts were all written in the post-unification years with the exception of 'Ein Ausflug am Wochenende', which was written in 1987. See also note 14 of this chapter.

⁷⁰ This was the biggest conference which has ever taken place on environmental issues. Its aim was to promote economic development only when this is compatible with the environment. In the course of the conference various agreements were reached, including Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, which were an important step towards the assessment of the situation of the world at the end of the century in order to start working towards possible solutions. However, the

defines as 'eine Stunde der Offenbarung' (RW, 12), her aim in the essays on her contemporary situation is to raise awareness about the real conditions of the world, which she presents as going towards self-destruction because of peoples' apathetic attitudes.⁷¹ The fact that in her opinion in the 1990s the world needed to be saved as much as in the 1980s, as the title indicates, is the reason why she takes upon herself again the role of the conscience of modern society and continues to conceive literature as a means of criticising modern civilisation (*Zivilisationskritik*), as she had done in *Respektloser Umgang*.

The similarity between Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual as it emerges from these essays and from *Respektloser Umgang* is also highlighted by the fact that the solutions she puts forward in these two works are not very different, which is relatively unsurprising, given that the problems have remained the same. She still believes in the 'Mobilisierung der Humanität' (RU, 94), which will be possible once all the individuals are ready to accept their own responsibility to play a part within the historical process. In both works she expresses the view that this sense of collective responsibility is the key to saving the world from self-annihilation.⁷²

In *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, however, it becomes clear that the Revolution made her reflect further on this idea, which here appears to have been refined. The difficulties that she personally experienced in trying to define her collective and individual identities have made her aware that in the GDR the community very often became a refuge for those unwilling or afraid to assume their own responsibility. For this

conference also showed the reluctance of certain countries, notably the USA, to acknowledge the urgency of the situation. See 'Internationale Beziehungen II, Frieden und Sicherheit in den 90er Jahren', *Informationen zur politischen Bildung*, No. 246, 1995.

⁷¹ In section 2.3.1.1 I discussed Königsdorf's views on peoples' complacency in her contemporary society and the solutions she put forward to remedy it.

⁷² In section 2.3.1.1 I also explained that, according to Königsdorf, individuals will accept their responsibility once they are made aware that it is in their interest to act upon the present situation. In this context, she suggests that raising awareness could be a task for scientists.

reason, she now emphasises that a collective identity is positive only when formed by responsible individuals and based on a 'Wechselverhältnis zwischen dem Ich und dem Wir',⁷³ where both parts continuously adjust themselves to each other. On these premisses, according to the logic of her thought, once people have been made aware of the seriousness of the world's problems - the task she assumes as a writer - they will also automatically realise that it is in their own interest to start 'mobilising themselves' in order to find solutions. It is in this framework that a collective identity should come about. Given the global dimensions of the problems which concern her, such as the destruction of the environment, these can only be solved when everybody co-operates.

In addition, Königsdorf's decision to focus once more on the concept of collective identity and collective sense of responsibility, after having found it difficult to speak with her own voice during the GDR years, can also be seen as a reaction to the individualistic orientation of the post-unification society. Although she acknowledges the negative tendency to conform as a side effect of the GDR collective identity, she nevertheless emphasises other aspects of her GDR experience, which in her opinion are worth considering. She mentions for instance the ability 'das Räderwerk im Auge [zu] behalten' (RW, 45) and to look beyond one's immediate personal needs and aspirations, in order to feel involved in the historical process, which could help to counteract the widespread individualistic attitude of 'Auf-sich-selbst-gerichtet sein'.⁷⁴ This sense of responsibility for the whole which emerges within her identity as an intellectual can also be observed in the context of her identity as a citizen, as she often shows that she feels part of a bigger community than Germany.⁷⁵

⁷³ Interview with Gaus [see note 56 of Chapter 1], 86.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁷⁵ See also section 4.4.2 in which I deal with Königsdorf's internationalist attitude in the post-unification years.

3.4.3 Documentary Literature in the Post-Unification Period

While on the one hand in her post-unification writings Königsdorf is concerned for the whole of mankind, on the other hand she continues to be interested in the process of Eastern and Western Germany coming together. For instance, this is made evident by her desire to document through authentic testimonies ‘die Schwierigkeit, ein Volk zu sein’, as the subtitle of her second collection of interviews, *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, indicates. Her interest in the process of integration of the two Germanies started in 1990 with the work *Adieu DDR* and continued to characterise Königsdorf’s profile as an intellectual in the post-unification years. As early as 1991, she was ready to collect another series of interviews under the title *Ankunft in Deutschland*, which should have been the follow-up to *Adieu DDR*. However, as a further proof that unification was a body-blow to the sense of dignity of the Eastern Germans, she soon realised that it was not possible to put together another book resembling the first, because, as she said at the time: ‘[...] die Leute sprechen nicht mehr. Sie haben Angst. Gewiß nicht mehr die Angst, eingesperrt zu werden. Aber das soziale Fallbeil ist auch nicht zu verachten’ (DC, 92).

Despite this initial unwillingness of the Eastern Germans to talk freely about their experience, in 1995 she finally managed to produce *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*. In this later collection of interviews not just people from Eastern Germany (seven of whom had also collaborated in *Adieu DDR*) but also Western Germany take stock of their losses and gains since 3 October 1990. Apart from this difference, Königsdorf’s two volumes of interviews share the same characteristics: ordinary people are the protagonists, even if the author is not entirely invisible, for it is possible to guess what questions she chose to ask. This has the effect of adding to the authenticity of the interviews as it also gives the readers an idea of the interlocutor’s opinions and her active participation in the dialogue and the process of confrontation which is taking place.

In addition, both these works are the consequence of Königsdorf's new sense of responsibility towards history in wanting to provide future generations with authentic documents recounting the human side of the events of 1989-90, as she had already done with *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*. In the foreword to *Adieu DDR*, she states that in the book she has 'Zeugnis abgelegt' (AD, 9), and in the foreword to *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, she says that her intention with this work is to offer 'ein Bild der Zeit' (UD, 8).

However, what comes as a surprise is that five years after unification, Königsdorf's motivation for compiling these interviews was not so different from the reason which made documentary literature into a popular genre in the 1970s and 1980s in the GDR.⁷⁶ During those years, it met the need for authentic and credible stories which could not be satisfied either by the fictional literature of the time or by the official media, which used to gloss over any kind of difficulty. Documentary literature was therefore conceived as a counter-movement to the fiction of that period, and above all as a means of replacing journalism and thus of throwing new light on the real living conditions of the people in the GDR. In 1995, despite all the changes brought about by unification in the media landscape, Königsdorf seemed still to be uncertain whether the post-unification media were dealing adequately with current issues.⁷⁷ Hence, *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* can also be interpreted as Königsdorf's attempt to compensate

⁷⁶ I briefly dealt with the role played by documentary literature in stimulating the discussion of women's issues and with the impact of the work *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* by Maxie Wander on Königsdorf's short stories about women in section 1.2.

⁷⁷ In an interview, she said: '[...] der jetzige Zustand [fordert] eine breite Diskussion geradezu heraus. Aber sie fehlt. Deshalb frage ich mich: Ist das überhaupt noch eine demokratische Öffentlichkeit?'. See 'Es kommen lausige Zeiten, das ist absehbar', interview with Großmann K. and Hanig, K., *Sächsische Zeitung*, 20.08.1993. Königsdorf's distrust towards the media emerges also in her post-unification novels, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, as I point out in section 5.3.1.1. I also draw attention to this point in note 44 of this chapter. The fact that these works still display traces of the role of literature as a substitute for the media (*Ersatzöffentlichkeit*) indicates that through them Königsdorf's intention was to throw light on problematic issues, which, according to her, were unlikely to be discussed in other media.

for the inability of the media to offer a forum for open discussion of the experience of Eastern and Western German citizens in unified Germany.

Here it is clear that she is still taking upon herself the task of expressing solidarity with people through literature. This work does not simply provide a basis for comparison with *Adieu DDR* in order to assess how the process of integration has been progressing since unification. On the contrary, it was born out of Königsdorf's belief in man's alienation in modern capitalist society, which does not give the individual enough opportunities to get directly involved with the system: '[...] der einzelne [ist] noch nie so klein und machtlos gewesen wie jetzt. Die Welt wird ihm zwar täglich per Bildschirm serviert, aber es bleibt eine Kunstwelt, in der er nur Zuschauer ist' (UD, 8). Therefore, she assumes that there are gaps within society's public discourse which, in line with the GDR's tradition of authors as the providers of aid to living (*Lebenshilfe*), she believes can be filled in by literature.⁷⁸ This is precisely the case in *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, where she fights against the alienation of the individual by transforming normal people from passive spectators into protagonists.

3.5 Conclusion

Despite the pain and the disorientation which Königsdorf suffered as a result of the failure of the Revolution, overall she demonstrated a lot of courage in accepting the challenge of the new era which followed the collapse of the GDR. Her prolific production of non-fictional material in 1989-90 attests to her readiness to re-assess her identity, without letting the events take her over. On the contrary, she always tried to analyse the situation and her own behaviour with lucidity and responsibility. This process of self-appraisal resulted in Königsdorf introducing important changes into her multi-layered identity.

⁷⁸ This is also the case in Königsdorf's post-unification novels, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, which I analyse as examples of literature providing aid to living in section 5.3.1.4. See also note 45 of this chapter.

One of these is without doubt the fact that she has learnt to use her subjective voice. After the initial hesitation to drop her collective identity and start speaking for herself, in some of the texts in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, she shows she is ready to share her personal experiences with the readers without the mediation of fictional characters. Hence, in the post-unification years not only did she increasingly affirm herself as a non-fictional writer, but she also began to approach non-fiction from a subjective point of view.

Another remarkable change, which also becomes evident in this collection, is that she renounced her political identity as a supporter of the Left and started placing her reflections in a politically neutral space. Even though the core of her concerns remained the welfare of mankind, this was no longer related to the realisation of a socialist utopia. In the following chapters, I will examine how the loss of this utopia affected her post-unification fictional production, and how she reacted to the loss of the sense of belonging which her political identity used to fulfil.

However, even though Königsdorf separated herself from politics, what remained a characteristic of her intellectual identity is her conviction of the importance of committing herself through literature to the well-being of mankind. For this reason, she kept viewing her task as an intellectual as having to raise awareness. In other words, she continued to feel responsible for the development of society and tried to have an impact on it through her writings. What is interesting in this regard is that in order to evaluate society's progress, she can continue to use the same yardstick which she adopted during the GDR, the idea of respect for human dignity.

While on the one hand Königsdorf felt a general sense of responsibility towards the rest of the world, on the other hand, in her post-unification novels she maintained a specific Eastern German perspective

and a special sense of commitment towards the Eastern Germans. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* are, at least in part, the expression of her lack of faith in the ability of the media to represent the Eastern German perspective. These works are also intended to offer the Eastern Germans some solidarity, thus illustrating her willingness to take upon herself the task of compensating through her writings for what society does not provide for its citizens. In short, these works show that literature for Königsdorf continued to play one of its old roles, that of providing the readers with aid to living. In this context, it is therefore interesting to point out that this is also the function which Königsdorf attributed to literature when she put together *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, but with the significant difference that here she was not solely interested in representing the Eastern Germans but the Western Germans too. In this sense, with *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* Königsdorf shows that she was beginning to feel more at home within unified Germany. Subsequently this work can be said to be a step ahead of her first post-unification novels and be paving the way to her latest novel, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, in which, as discussed in Chapter Five, the distinction between East and West is no longer significant.

Ultimately, what seems the most important thing to stress within the evolution of Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual, is that she managed to change some aspects of it and maintain others mainly because of the courageous way in which she re-assessed herself. It was her readiness to confront uncomfortable questions, which in the end made it possible for her to keep talking, even after she realised she had pursued a dream which could not be fulfilled. It is the fact that she went through a process of re-appraisal which continues to give validity to her message even after 1990, the message of an intellectual who had the strength to revise her position and start afresh.

Chapter Four

Helga Königsdorf's Identity as a Citizen

4.1 Introduction

The events of 1989-90 have influenced to different degrees the various aspects of Königsdorf's identity presented up to this point. In the case of her identity as a woman writer, the changes of 1989-90 enabled her to explore areas, such as homosexuality, which were taboo in the GDR. As regards her identity as a scientist, they left her preoccupation with scientific issues unaltered while giving her the opportunity to discuss her ideas in non-fictional genres. More radical was their impact on Königsdorf's identity as an intellectual, as in this period she developed into a politically independent non-fiction writer and started making her voice heard within the media, a process which continued into the post-unification years. While within all these identities the events of 1989-90 contributed to enriching Königsdorf's literary profile, there is one aspect of her identity which was wiped out with unification: her identity as a GDR citizen.

The speed and the degree of change represented by unification gave rise in the former GDR to general feelings of confusion with regard to identity, as this could no longer be East German and was not yet German. In Königsdorf's case, the vacuum left by the disappearance of the GDR led to an identity crisis during which she gradually tried to construct a relationship to the new society created by unification. This identity crisis becomes evident in her non-fiction writings of 1989-90, but also in her first post-unification novels, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, in which she deals centrally with the meaning of homeland (*Heimat*) and the idea of belonging.

In order to illustrate the consequences of unification on Königsdorf's understanding of herself as a GDR citizen, it is necessary first to analyse her relationship to East Germany. This will be the point of departure for my exploration of the manner in which Königsdorf reconstructed a sense of home for herself in the post-unification years after the confusion and the disorientation she experienced during the 'peaceful Revolution'. The process, which Königsdorf undertook in order to redefine her concept of homeland and come to terms with her life as a citizen of unified Germany, represents what I call here the evolution of her identity as a citizen. In this context, the notion of citizen is not understood as a framework to explain Königsdorf's legal, political and social rights and her obligations. Consequently, I will neither draw attention to the main theories of citizenship and the divergent positions surrounding them nor to the controversies about the ethnic concept of citizenship - 'blood-right' notion of German citizenship - which has been widely debated in the last few years.¹ Instead, the term 'citizen' is here introduced to indicate Königsdorf's emotional relationship and sense of belonging first to the GDR and then to unified Germany and her understanding of the concept of home as emerges from her fictional and non-fictional writings.

First, I will examine Königsdorf's Jewish background and her social origins as elements contributing to her identification with the Party, which effectively became her home. Subsequently, once the SED regime disappeared, she had to try to find a substitute for the Party. Unfortunately, similarly to the main character in *Gleich neben Afrika* whose search for the

¹ Thomas Janoski identifies three different groups of theories with regard to citizenship: Marshall's theory of citizenship, the Tocqueville/Durkheimian approach to civic culture and the Gramsci/Marxist theory of civil society. See Janoski, T., *Citizenship and Civil Society: A Framework of Rights and Obligations in Liberal, Traditional and Social Democratic Regimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a discussion of issues of citizenship with regard to Germany before and after unification, see Fulbrook, M., 'Germany for the Germans? Citizenship and Nationality in a Divided Nation', in Cesarani, D. and Fulbrook, M. (eds), *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 88-105.

meaning of home leads her to a banana plantation on a remote island, Königsdorf was not successful in finding a new homeland for herself immediately after unification. On the contrary, she carried out many experiments and explored many ideas in order to re-establish a balance between herself and her surroundings. Thus, in the years 1989-90 she tried to maintain a sense of belonging by becoming a member of the PDS and to re-define her origins by going back to her home region, Thuringia.

However, as she realised that these were attempts to stress continuity with her GDR identity and that what she should have done instead was to acknowledge and internalise the changes brought about by unification, her search for a sense of home went through a second phase in the post-unification period. In the early 1990s she alternated sporadic suggestions that society should be decentralised as a means of facilitating the process of identification with the area where one lives, with ideas of internationalism. In line with the latter, she assumed the identity of a citizen of the world, which she justified by pointing out that the problems affecting modern society had reached global dimensions and that as a consequence there was the need to think on a global scale. Finally, after frequent consideration of the meaning of being German in post-unification society, Königsdorf seemed ready to start acknowledging the whole of Germany as her homeland. The fact that she managed to combine within her identity her GDR past and her new status as a citizen of unified Germany is shown by the novel *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, since here she no longer presents the view of society split between the Eastern and Western perspectives which is fundamental to *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*.²

² In section 3.5 I pointed out that the work which paved the way to *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* is the 1995 collection of interviews *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* in which Königsdorf interviews people from both Eastern and Western Germany, thus showing that she is not only interested in the Eastern German perspective, but in the complete picture of life in post-unification Germany.

This chapter will therefore be structured around the three main phases of the evolution of Königsdorf's identity as a citizen: the first one when she fully identified the GDR as her home, followed by the years 1989-90, in which she was overtaken by an identity crisis, and finally the last stage in the post-unification period, in which she fluctuated between ideas of decentralisation and internationalism. Although I will often refer to Königsdorf's non-fictional writings, I will also take into consideration three of her fictional works, *Respektloser Umgang*, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, as they represent the three main stages of her evolution. Thus, *Respektloser Umgang* can be shown to reflect the various aspects forming Königsdorf's identity as a citizen during the GDR, including her Jewish background, while *Gleich neben Afrika* reflects the identity crisis and the search for a new home in 1989-90, and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* shows that the crisis has been resolved and that Königsdorf's identity within unified Germany has reached a certain stability.

4.2 The Experience of Belonging in the GDR

Königsdorf's strong identification with the GDR becomes apparent only in retrospect, in her post-unification writings. Here it becomes clear that the socialist state of the GDR, embodied by the Party, represented her home, the site of her utopian longing and a place which fulfilled her sense of belonging. This is demonstrated not only by the way in which her post-1989 works betray feelings of nostalgia for the GDR, but also by her attitude towards unification, which she describes in the following words: 'Ohne den Ort zu verändern, gehen wir in die Fremde' (preface to AD). This clearly indicates that unification meant for Königsdorf having to give up her homeland.

While in the first euphoric phase Willi Brandt's famous motto about the 'Zusammenwachsen dessen, was zusammengehört' was often cited and

old concepts such as that of 'cultural nation' (*Kulturnation*)³ were revived, often with the intention of offering at least a cultural means of identification for both East and West Germany, Königsdorf continued to be convinced that in the forty years of separation the two Germanies had grown apart: 'Prägende vierzig Jahre, in denen man sich, trotz aller gegenteiligen Behauptungen, erst einmal fremd geworden ist (DC, 94).'⁴ These feelings of alienation from Western Germany should not come as a surprise if one considers that Königsdorf was born in 1938 and therefore did not know anything but the GDR. With regard to the past of Germany before the division into East and West, Königsdorf explains her position through the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang*, whose life resembles her own. The fictional character in the novel describes herself as having to history; this means that although she is aware of the history which preceded the GDR, she does not identify with it (RU, 20).

This reflects the general attitude of Königsdorf's generation, for whom an identification with German culture or with the German nation had been made impossible by the negative association of Germanness with the crimes of the Second World War. Hence, the fact that she says: 'An dem

³ 'Cultural nation' refers to the fact that since Germany was for centuries a fragmented, undefined political entity, it could stress its unity only through culture. Günter de Bruyn is one of the former GDR authors, who in 1990 proposed the idea of 'cultural nation' as the basis for the expression of one's identity. See Tate, D., 'Günter de Bruyn: the "gesamtdeutsche Konsensfigur" of Post-Unification Literature?', *German Life and Letters*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 1997, 201-213 (here 203). Among the Western German intellectuals Günter Grass also suggested the re-introduction of the concept of 'cultural nation'. However, Grass's proposal was not so much a response to the need to establish common ground between Eastern and Western Germany to facilitate the process of coming together. On the contrary, he used the idea of 'cultural nation' in his attempt to keep the two Germanies separate on a politico-economic level. According to him, this seemed the ideal compromise, as he was convinced that the politico-economic unification of Germany was going to encourage the rise of nationalism and have the same disastrous consequences as in the Second World War: 'Er [der Einheitsstaat] war die früh geschaffene Voraussetzung für Auschwitz. Er wurde latentem, auch anderswo üblichem Antisemitismus zur Machtbasis. Der deutsche Einheitsstaat verhalf der nationalsozialistischen Rassenideologie zu einer entsetzlich tauglichen Grundlage'. See Grass, G., 'Kurze Rede eines vaterlandlosen Gesellen', *Die Zeit*, 09.02.1990 and the interview in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 27.07.1990, cited by Glaser, H., *Deutsche Kultur: Ein historischer Überblick von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997), 431.

⁴ She stresses this concept also in the text 'Überleben wäre eine prima Alternative', in RW, 57-68 (here 57).

Wort “deutsch” trugen wir wie an einem Körperteil, der zwar nicht ganz richtig ist, auf den man aber auch nicht verzichten kann’ (DC, 12), indicates their conflict-ridden relationship to the past of their country. On the one hand, they refused to identify themselves with the sense of shame at being German resulting from the developments of the War and to blame themselves for crimes they had not committed - this was certainly true of Königsdorf, whose grandmother was Jewish. On the other hand, however, they could not completely disregard the past, as they felt the need to explore their roots in order to be able to define themselves.

The GDR tried to influence the younger generation’s process of finding its own identity. For instance, it helped them to disassociate themselves from the fascist phase of Germany history by promoting the myth of East Germany as a country of resistance fighters.⁵ Among the measures adopted, there was also the attempt in the Honecker era of gradually eliminating the word ‘German’ and ‘Germany’ from daily life.⁶ At the same time a kind of socialist patriotism was encouraged, which aimed at separating Eastern Germany from the Nazi past of pre-War Germany, and placing it instead within the revolutionary tradition of the

⁵ I discussed this point also in section 5.2.3, in which I emphasise the role played by literature in promoting the myth of the GDR as an antifascist country.

⁶ In 1974 article 1 of the GDR’s constitution was amended. The 1968 version: ‘Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik ist ein sozialistischer Staat deutscher Nation’ was transformed into ‘Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik ist ein sozialistischer Staat der Arbeiter und Bauern’. In the period which followed this revision, the GDR slowly proceeded to eliminate everything which contained the word ‘Deutschland’ or ‘deutsch’. For example the ‘Hotel Deutschland’ in Leipzig was renamed ‘Hotel am Ring’. The only exceptions were the SED, the central organ, the four block parties, the mass organisations and the Deutsche Reichsbahn, which could not be renamed because of the international contract it was linked to until 1989. The abbreviation ‘DDR’ became gradually preferable to the use of the adjective ‘German’. The word ‘Deutschland’ even disappeared from the second edition of Meyer’s *Neues Lexikon*. In 1978, probably because of fear of incurring ridicule, the word ‘Deutschland’ was re-introduced and defined as follows: ‘Deutschland: bis 1945 Land in Mitteleuropa, dann von ausländischen und deutschen Imperialisten systematisch gespalten. Seit 1945 existieren auf dem Territorium des ehemaligen D. die Deutsche Demokratische Republik und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, zwei Staaten mit gegensätzlicher politisch-gesellschaftlicher Ordnung’. Cited by Wolle, S., *Die heile Welt der Diktatur* [see note 39 of Chapter 3], 64. Königsdorf herself talks about this elimination of the word ‘German’ from her vocabulary: ‘Irgendwann strich man das Wort “deutsch” im Namen der Institutionen. Dafür erschien nachgestellt “...der DDR”. “DDR” ließ sich schlecht adjektivieren. Aber man wußte sich zu behelfen. Wir wurden “unsere Menschen” [...]’ (RW, 58).

international workers' movement. This is evident from an official definition of this new form of patriotism:

Sozialistischer Patriotismus, in organischer Beziehung mit dem proletarischen Internationalismus, gehört zu den grundlegenden Wesensmerkmalen sozialistischer Nationalkultur. Er bezieht sich auf den historischen Platz und die revolutionären Aufgaben, auf Geschichte, Errungenschaften, Land und Staat der DDR als einen Bestandteil unserer sozialistischen Völkerfamilie; er ist Ausdruck der unantastbaren Souveränität und territorialen Integrität unseres Heimatlandes gegenüber allen imperialistischen Machenschaften.⁷

4.2.1 Königsdorf's Jewish Identity

Despite this possibility of hiding behind the anti-fascist façade of the GDR, Königsdorf was not able to identify herself with the heroes of the antifascist resistance. Instead she felt compelled to undergo an analysis of her family history in order to understand herself better. She did so through the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang*, who has to come to terms with the fact that to dismiss the past is simply impossible, as the Nazi regime and its racial discrimination is the very reason why she came into the world. Her father, in fact, was half-Jewish and, like many others of his generation, had been educated to believe in 'Recht und Ordnung' (RU, 31), to the point that when the Nuremberg Racial Laws were promulgated, he was still of the opinion that 'Schlechtes Recht sei besser als gar kein Recht' (RU, 38). As a result of the education he had received and the fact that he felt embedded within German culture, the only way in which he could oppose that system, which was trying to suppress his race, was by the act of procreation: 'meine Zeugung war auch eine Art persönlichen Widerstandes. Ein Stück Selbstbehauptung. Das Bestreben meines Vaters, sich nicht zum Objekt machen zu lassen' (RU, 53).⁸

⁷ Zur Kulturpolitik der SED seit dem IX. Parteitag der SED und die weiteren Aufgaben 1981/82; SAMPO-BArch, vorl. SED Dy 30 32782/1, 15.

⁸ In section 1.6, I explained that for the sense of self-worth of the father it would have been better if he had had a son. As this did not happen, he raised his daughter as if she were a boy. This is therefore a further aspect of the pressure to do well, which she experienced as a child, as she felt she could not disappoint her father.

Apart from being decisive for her existence, the experiences of her Jewish family also continued to influence her life later on, as her parents placed their hopes on her as the means by which they might finally overcome their feeling of inferiority and gain recognition within GDR society. In order to retrace the history of humiliations endured by her family over the years, Königsdorf introduces the figure of a Jewish grandmother, a typical assimilationist German Jewess of the period before 1933.⁹ She is described as a woman who was proud to be Jewish - for instance she claimed to be a descendant of King David - and yet strove to be part of German society, in which she tried to integrate herself by assimilating its culture: 'Geld oder Besitz waren in ihrer Familie nicht Ziel. Nur Mittel. Identifikation fand man in Bildung und Kultur' (RU, 16).

Significantly, on the day on which the grandmother acknowledged what was really happening in Germany and became aware that she was a threat for her own family,¹⁰ she started refusing to eat. This was also the day on which she stopped reading Goethe. Before then she had managed to justify the situation through the recurrent use of scapegoats, even if this meant accusing other Jews: 'Man fühlte sich dem umgebenden Kulturkreis so verbunden, daß für alles, was dann geschah, außerhalb liegende Gründe gefunden werden mußten. Die Juden im Osten etwa, denen nachgesagt wurde, sie brächten die Rasse in Verruf' (RU, 16). A similar reaction attesting to the reluctance of some Jews to admit to the gravity of the situation is that of Lise Meitner. In fact, the famous scientist refused to understand that her life was seriously threatened by the political events.

⁹ In some aspects, the figure of the grandmother resembles Königsdorf's: both were of Jewish origins and were also both called Rena.

¹⁰ By stating that '[d]ie Jüdin gefährdete die Familie' with reference to the grandmother, she draws a parallel between this woman and the scientist Lise Meitner, who, as she was also Jewish, is described as threatening the institute for which she was working: '[d]ie Jüdin gefährdete das Institut' (RU, 38). While Meitner had to leave the institute and take refuge in Stockholm, the narrator finds herself considering whether the grandmother's fears that somebody, her daughter-in-law for example, wanted to poison her in order to protect her own children were founded.

Her only concern was to continue her scientific experiments, and, ironically, she defined as ‘murder’ (RU, 34) the fact that in 1938 she was made to leave Berlin and take refuge in Stockholm.¹¹

These examples demonstrate to what extent the German Jews were embedded in German society and felt part of it. It was their sense of belonging which prevented them from becoming fully aware of the discrimination they were suffering, and it was the combination of their sense of loyalty towards the German nation with the way in which they had been educated which made them reject a priori the idea of opposing the system: ‘Der Gedanke an Widerstand gegen die Obrigkeit war in seinem logischen System überhaupt nicht vorgesehen’ (RU, 98).

However, the Jews were not the only ones who found it difficult to understand what was happening in Germany during the Third Reich. Through the figure of the grandfather, Königsdorf depicts the bewildered state of Germans related to the Jews by marriage, by showing how this man, described as ‘herrisch’ and ‘jähzornig’ (RU, 17), lost all his energy the moment when ‘die Welt seiner Wertvorstellung zusammengebrochen war’ (RU, 17). The puzzlement was such that the grandparents could find no words to explain reality. Hence, during his wife’s illness, the grandfather visited her every day, sat by her bed for half an hour without saying a word, and then left, even if, as the narrator comments, ‘in den letzten Jahren schien es, als sei ihr Schweigen beredt geworden’ (RU, 17). Eventually when the grandmother gave up on this world, which she no longer recognised by refusing to eat, her husband did not force food upon her. On the contrary, he let himself die shortly after she had passed away.

¹¹ See note 62 of Chapter 1.

The consequence of the discrimination suffered over the years by the narrator's family was that they increased their efforts to achieve a sense of belonging and feel fully accepted. As I have pointed out in the case of the grandmother, she tried to counteract her sense of being different by absorbing German culture, hoping to show in this way that she belonged. The father as well strove to be seen as a good citizen. For this reason, he was ready to conform to the point of going against his own interests, as illustrated by the fact that he always voted 'deutschnational' (GA, 34) and kept repeating to himself that 'Rechtsstaat war Rechtsstaat' (GA, 41).¹²

The humiliations suffered during the war had the effect of increasing the desire of the family to prove that the Jews had been unjustly classified as inferior. This led them to put a lot of pressure onto the next generation, to which they ascribed the task of bringing back to the family the feeling of self-worth.¹³ For this reason, the protagonists of both *Respektloser Umgang* and *Gleich neben Afrika*¹⁴ were expected to excel in everything they undertook. Thus, in *Respektloser Umgang*, the main character observes: 'Es wurde einfach stillschweigend vorausgesetzt, daß ich überall die Erste war. Dabei darf nicht vergessen werden, meine Entstehung war die Antwort meiner Eltern auf ihre Abstempelung zu Untermenschen' (RU, 91-92). The same kind of remark is made by the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika*:

¹² In this instance I am specifically referring to the father figure mentioned in *Gleich neben Afrika*, while in the preceding examples I deal with the protagonist's father in *Respektloser Umgang*. I nevertheless consciously interchanged these two characters because they appear to be the same. They correspond to each other not only with regard to their background, but also to their way of thinking.

¹³ According to the psychologist Hillel Klein the need to put a lot of pressure on the children to be successful is one of the characteristics of the family dynamics of those who survived the Holocaust. Other traits typical of these families are the parents' exaggerated protective behaviour towards their children or their very strong fears of being separated from them. See Bubis, N., 'Die jüdischen Generationen nach dem Holocaust', in Lichtenstein, H. and Romberg, O. R. (eds), *Täter – Opfer – Folgen: Der Holocaust in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997), 198-203 (here 202).

¹⁴ Despite the many similarities between the protagonists of these two novels, as indicated by the above reference, there is nevertheless a main difference between them which needs mentioning: while *Respektloser Umgang*'s protagonist is a scientist, the one in *Gleich neben Afrika* is a writer. However, this passage also corresponds to Königsdorf's biography as in 1990 she became a full-time writer and left her job as a mathematician.

‘Bei allen Demütigungen, denen die Familie unterworfen gewesen war, setzte man auf mich, wie andere Leute auf die Wunderwaffe hofften. Ich selbst konnte mich natürlich solchem massiven Meinungsdruck nicht ganz entziehen’ (GA, 17-18).

According to Paul O’Doherty, the popular perception of Jews in the GDR was that the Jews as a people and their terrible experience of the Holocaust belonged to the past, and consequently had very little to do with the present reality of the socialist state.¹⁵ This does not seem to be true of Königsdorf, who always felt personally involved in the Holocaust, although she was not directly a victim of it. The very thought that her fate might have been different enables her to imagine herself as a prisoner in a concentration camp:

Für mich blieben die Berichte von den Lagern nie abstrakt. Immer war ich mittendrin. Teil einer grauen todgeweihten Menschenreihe. Lange nach der Kindheit Angst vor einem bestimmten Typus Mann. Von den Grausamkeiten der Frauen erfuhr ich erst später. Und später natürlich auch die Entdeckung, daß man nicht nur das Leiden, sondern auch die Schuld mittragen muß. (RU, 83)

This passage also reveals the fact that for Königsdorf the exploration and understanding of her Jewish origins is an ongoing process, aimed at answering the question: ‘Wie sind wir so geworden, wie wir heute sind?’¹⁶ It is clear that over the years she has come to know more about the Holocaust, processed the information and tried to live with it. *Respektloser Umgang* and *Gleich neben Afrika* appear therefore as examples of how she felt involved in the Holocaust and how she lived her Jewish identity as a present reality, which had a profound impact on her life.¹⁷

¹⁵ See O’Doherty, P., *The Portrayal of Jews in GDR Prose Fiction* [see note 26 of the Introduction], 57.

¹⁶ This is the leitmotif of Christa Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster* (Darmstadt; Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1985), first published in 1976.

¹⁷ The short story, ‘Heimkehr einer Prinzessin’, is another piece of work which deals with the Jewish theme. In this text, Königsdorf tells about the efforts of a mother married to a Jew to protect her daughter from the horrors of the Second World War. The mother invents a fairy tale in which the daughter is a princess which explains why she was being seen as different and forced to grow up in isolation. Once she is an adult, the ‘princess’ reflects whether it is after all a

4.2.2 The Idea of the Party as Home

Königsdorf's awareness of her Jewish origins played a role within her perception of herself as a GDR citizen and in increasing her desire to belong. My argument is based on the assumption that the humiliating history of exclusion experienced by her family is one of the reasons why for her it became important to be able to serve her homeland not only through her work as a scientist but also through her writings. In this fashion, she could strengthen her sense of belonging. In my view, this also explains why she decided to enter the Party, as this was the best way for her to feel that she was integrated within society. Her membership in the Party gave her a real chance to contribute to the development of society and to unfold fully her identity as a politically active citizen of an evolving society. As she herself remarked: 'Ich hatte eine bestimmte Verantwortung übernommen [referring to her job as a scientist], und ich wollte etwas machen und darüber auch mitbestimmen können'.¹⁸

Another element which might have influenced Königsdorf's decision to enter the Party seems to emerge from her non-fictional writings. I am referring to her 'wrong' social origins as the descendant of a family of wealthy farmers.¹⁹ Königsdorf says she experienced this as a 'stigma', which influenced her entire life (DC, 37). According to my analysis, this had an impact on her life in the sense that it made her feel different and thus forced her to work even harder to identify with the GDR, the socialist state 'der Arbeiter und Bauern'.²⁰ Hence, in this case as well, she needed to

good idea to shelter children from the reality of life. This story, part of MT, 104-111, has not been included in the above discussion because it is not based on Königsdorf's life and in this sense it does not seem to be particularly relevant to defining Königsdorf's identity as a citizen during the GDR era.

¹⁸ Interview with Gaus [see note 56 of Chapter 1], 88.

¹⁹ For no apparent reason, while she deals a great deal with the theme of Jewish identity in her fictional works, this is never treated in her non-fictional writings. By contrast, she talks about her social origins only in her essays, but not in her novels. The only exception is *Gleich neben Afrika* in which the protagonist's parents were wealthy farmers, who as in Königsdorf's case, owned quite a lot of land and a big house in the shape of a castle.

²⁰ See note 7 of this chapter.

counterbalance her sense of being different by finding acceptance in another way. This is therefore another aspect of her identity, which endangered her sense of belonging, but which she could remedy by choosing to be a member of the Party. As Königsdorf explains:

Diese Partei ist uns Heimat gewesen. Wir hatten keine andere. Den meisten von uns war Zugehörigkeit schon einmal in Frage gestellt worden. Sei es als Täter oder Opfer oder als Kinder von Tätern oder Opfern. Weil wir nicht die rechte soziale Herkunft oder die falsche Verwandtschaft hatten. (DC, 12)

While having the 'wrong social origins' and being Jewish largely reflect Königsdorf's life-based experiences, in her post-unification novels she keeps exploring the reasons which might have drawn people to the Party. In *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, for instance, she presents the figure of the 'Alte', whose sense of belonging to the GDR was threatened by his Nazi father, who at the end of the war killed himself and his wife, and he would have shot his two sons too, had they not been saved by their aunts. This fact has a very negative impact not only on the personal life, but also on the social reputation of the 'Alte', forever stained by his shameful family background:

Die Berichte über die Tat des Vaters hatten sein Leben bestimmt. Eine Ideologie, die den eigenen Vater dazu gebracht hatte, die Mutter zu töten, und die um Haaresbreite auch ihm das Leben gekostet hätte, erfüllte ihn noch nachträglich mit einer Empörung, die tief im Gefühl wurzelte. Um so mehr hatte es ihn betroffen, daß man ihm wegen dieses Vaters nie voll vertraut hatte. Der Vater war ein unauslöschlicher Schandfleck in seiner Kaderakte geblieben. (SR, 32)

Although this case contrasts with that of Königsdorf's figures of Jewish origin, as in the first instance we are dealing with the victim and in the second with the perpetrator, they all share the same need for belonging intensified by their particular backgrounds. In fact, the 'Alte' does not want to have anything to do with his father, but be accepted by the society in which he lives. That is why he too looks for identification with the Party, which ends up replacing the family he has never had. Within the Party he

knows that he can rely on his membership to feel welcome and supported despite his embarrassing background: 'Die Partei [...] war ihm Heimat gewesen, hatte ihm die Familie ersetzt. In der Familie konnte man einander auch nicht aussuchen. Aber nach außen hielt man zusammen' (SR, 36).

Apart from political or social reasons influencing one's sense of belonging, in some cases the Party simply represented the right answer for those people who did not feel accepted and loved. This seems to be the case for Alice, whose energy and efforts have been constantly channelled towards finding love. However, her quest remains unsuccessful until she enters the Party, where for the first time she experiences a new kind of love, 'die Liebe zur Sache', which, in her view, is much stronger than the love between man and woman (SR, 86).²¹

In the light of this qualitatively superior feeling which new members experience towards the Party, Königsdorf compares the emotions caused by becoming a member of the Party to those felt when entering a religious community. This mystic atmosphere emerges for instance during the ceremony marking the official acceptance of Alice as a candidate for membership of the Party: as the 'Alte' shakes her hand, she experiences a 'Moment tiefer religiöser Hingabe' (SR, 86). Even after 1989, when Alice decides to leave it, she does so with shaking legs and the feeling of being a traitor. Ultimately, it seems that in her fiction Königsdorf associates the idea of being a member of the Party with a religious experience because this also corresponds to her personal experience. This is how she describes it: 'Es hatte auch etwas von Zugehörigkeit zu einer Religionsgemeinschaft. Da habe ich doch mit mir selbst erstaunliche Dinge erlebt, zum Beispiel, daß sich da auch sehr starke emotionale Bindungen entwickelt hatten'.²²

²¹ In section 2.3.2 I pointed out that Alice tries to fulfil her desire to be loved by dedicating herself completely to mathematics.

²² Interview with Gaus, 90.

The common denominator explaining the attractiveness of the Party in all these cases is the fact that it offered to anybody, regardless of their political and social background or their personal weaknesses, the warmth of a community. The comfort of belonging together, strengthened by the supposed existence of common interests and a common goal, allowed people to hide their sense of being different. This helped them to fulfil their need for belonging and acceptance, but at the same time it also contributed to the suppression of their individuality:

Wie nach einem Strohalm griff der Mensch nach dem Angebot eines Wir, um sein ungeliebtes Ich zu bergen. Er brauchte eine Heimat, einen Sinn, eine kollektive Idee, der er sich unterordnen, in deren Dienst er sich hervortun konnte, ohne daß es auf sein Ich angekommen wäre. (SR, 20)

This statement helps us to understand why people accepted so many compromises in the name of the Party. Once they started enjoying the comforts of their membership, their fear grew of losing the love that they had just begun to experience. It is therefore this fear that led many people, including Königsdorf as she herself admits in her writings of 1989-90, to compromise their dignity in order not to lose the psychological comfort of their membership of the Party.²³

4.2.3. Königsdorf's Identity as a Citizen in Her Pre-1989 Writings

The contradiction between Königsdorf's identity as a citizen and as an intellectual lies in the fact that, despite her strong need to be integrated within society, what predominates in her work of the GDR era is her critical perspective on the system. This reflects the characteristic contradiction of GDR intellectuals, whose works were critical of state socialism as practised in the GDR in the hope that in this way they would make progress towards

²³ I dealt with the mechanisms leading to the loss of dignity of the Party members in detail in section 3.2.2.2.

achieving the socialist utopia.²⁴ It also shows that by the time Königsdorf started writing, her identity as a citizen must have been well-defined, otherwise she would have been too fearful to criticise the development of the GDR. While I have pointed out that being a member of the Party increased her sense of belonging, her writing activity as well can be seen as one of the elements proving that she felt at home in the GDR. Her own definition of homeland as the place ‘wo man sich einmischen darf’ (DC, 51) is a confirmation of this.

Moreover, the fact that the GDR was a society in evolution enhanced the sense that individuals could contribute a lot to shaping its development and thus feel more deeply involved in it. This is a further aspect of why criticism was perceived as a way to achieve the goal of a society based on true socialist ideals. For Königsdorf, as for many other intellectuals, the GDR represented a project to which they committed themselves by trying to improve it with their writings. For these reasons, the GDR’s shortcomings almost increased the intellectuals’ sense of belonging and their desire to participate actively in its progression. In Königsdorf’s case, who belonged to the group of those: ‘die in diesen vierzig Jahren eine DDR-Verbundenheit entwickelt haben’, her relationship to the DDR can be compared to that ‘zu einem steinigen Stück Land [...], das man unter großen Mühen zu bessern versucht’ (DC, 31).

In this light, it should not come as a surprise if Königsdorf’s identification with East Germany is never a theme in itself in her pre-1989 works, but is recognisable in the nature of her criticism of the GDR’s shortcomings. What emerges more strongly in the years leading to 1989, especially from *Respektloser Umgang*, is the international quality of her message. Although this can be seen as related to the socialist tendency

²⁴ I explained this contradiction in more detail in section 3.2.1 and will return to it in section 5.2.1.

towards internationalism, it also reflects a reaction to the contemporary situation, in which the fate of the smaller nations seemed to depend on the American and Soviet blocs. For this reason, she decided not to side with the communist countries or made distinction between the responsibilities of the East and West halves of the world. Instead, her call for intervention was directed towards mankind as a whole as she idealistically believed that peace could be maintained and the world made into a better place through the 'Mobilisierung der Humanität' (RU, 94).²⁵

4.3 1989-90: The Search for a New Identity

The fact that Königsdorf identified herself with the Party emerges especially at the time following the demise of the GDR, as she herself states: 'Mit Erstaunen habe ich festgestellt, daß diese Partei mir so etwas wie Heimat war. Die einzige Zugehörigkeit in meinem Leben, die nie in Frage gestellt wurde. Dafür war ich zu allzu vielen Kompromissen bereit' (MS, 119-120). This is part of the reason why she tried to keep alive this sense of belonging to society and being able to contribute to it through her membership of a political party by presenting herself as a candidate of the PDS - the successor party of the SED - at the elections of 1990. As the experience ended in a failure, Königsdorf had to accept the fact that she had to find other ways to fill the gap left by her identification with the Party during the GDR years.

It was at this point that Königsdorf's search for the meaning of homeland and identity began. Consequently, her non-fictional writings and novels of this period are attempts to come to terms with the 'Schmerz, heimatlos geworden zu sein' (SR, 80). These works show that after the collapse of the GDR she was trapped between abandoning herself to nostalgic feelings and experimenting with the new situation in order to win

²⁵ I also discussed this point in sections 2.2.3.3 and 3.4.2.

back a sense of belonging. On the one hand, she missed the GDR, although this did not mean that she wanted to go back to the past. As she remarks in the case of Alice's feelings of nostalgia: 'Und dagegen half auch nicht, daß sie sich das Vergangene um nichts in der Welt zurückwünschte. Dadurch wurde der Schmerz nur größer' (SR, 85). On the other hand, she reacted to her loss of home by trying to replace it with a new one. One of the main actions she undertook in this respect was to return to Thuringia, her home region, because she was convinced that 'Es ist viel leichter, [sich] wieder an Thüringen zu gewöhnen, als an das große Deutschland' (DC, 36).

4.3.1 Königsdorf's Experience in Thuringia: an Attempt to Achieve Regional Identity?

Thuringia is the region where Königsdorf grew up before moving to Jena, the town in which she attended university. Once she graduated, she moved to Berlin, where she still lives. Her decision to visit Thuringia in 1990 was motivated by her desire to regain that sense of belonging which the recent events had swept away; it was not her intention to move there permanently. After the speed and enormity of the changes of the years 1989-90, she also wanted to adapt herself gradually to the new society by starting with a relatively small region. Unification invested the former GDR citizens with new concepts and institutions, such as the European Union of which all of a sudden they became members, without having the time to familiarise themselves with them. In the face of all of these transformations, Königsdorf was determined to understand the functioning of the Western world of which she had become part, and believed that the best way to do so was to proceed step-by-step, starting from small units. In her words: 'Wir sind nicht reif für die Idee von Europa. [...] Wir müssen uns erst einrichten, und dazu brauchen wir überschaubare Räume. Am einfachsten ist es jetzt für uns mit Thüringen, Mecklenburg und den anderen Ländern' (DC, 47).

Königsdorf discusses her journey back to Thuringia and explores new concepts of identity in her essays,²⁶ but she also fictionalises it in the novel *Gleich neben Afrika*. The reasons behind this trip as well as the conclusion drawn by Königsdorf on its outcome are essentially the same in all of her writings, although the fiction gives her the opportunity to introduce characters and situations which help her to illustrate better the emotions she went through during her stay. This is why, in my analysis of this experience, I mainly refer to how she approaches this theme in the novel through her main character.

As in Königsdorf's own case, the decision to return to Thuringia by the main character in *Gleich neben Afrika* is a reaction to the confusion brought about by the events of 1989-90. By returning to Thuringia, she hopes that a place to which she can relate will help her to find some clarity about and understanding of what has just happened. As she explains: '[...] in dieser Zeit, in der es keinen festen Punkt mehr gab, in der man von den Strudeln um und um gerissen wurde, brauchte man einen Ort, der zu einem gehört' (GA, 28).

However, while this is an attempt to regain the feeling of being at home, she soon realises that it is unrealistic to expect this from Thuringia for two main reasons. Firstly, since the region used to border with Bavaria, the demise of the GDR completely changed its topography. While it seemed 'als hätten sich die Gedanken früher nur in zwei Himmelsrichtungen bewegt' (GA, 29), now there are no traces left of the taboo area around the border. As a result, one can now wander into Bavaria even without realising it.

²⁶ See 'Thüringen, du mein lieb Heimatland', in DC, 35-43.

Moreover, the removal of the border had an impact on the locals too. Before 1989 there were some people living in the area who smuggled people or valuables into West Germany. Those who wanted to flee from the GDR often brought with them their precious possessions in order to finance the beginning of their new life in the West. Others smuggled art works and the like into the West. Sometimes it happened that people or valuables never made it to the other side (GA, 88). This provoked a climate of mistrust, which has now been replaced by cheerfulness (GA, 29). Although the protagonist views these changes as positive, they nevertheless make it more difficult for her to recognise her home region, as the present image of Thuringia does not match her personal memories.

However, if on the one hand this difficulty prevents her from feeling completely at home, on the other hand she has the impression of being 'einheimischer als die Ortsansässigen' (GA, 29). Since she has not been there for a long time, she remembers the region exactly as it was when she left. For example, she knows country paths which have been abandoned or forgotten for many years. This indicates that she is experiencing Thuringia in a different timeframe than the locals: while she is still immersed in the past and remembers things as they were before she went away, they live in the present: 'Während bei ihnen die Gegenwart alles überdeckte, erlebte ich eine seltsame Gleichzeitigkeit der Ereignisse' (GA, 29).

As part of the attempt to recreate that feeling of home which Königsdorf longed for and to re-establish her connection to the region, the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* gets in touch with two people: Fricka, the former head of the 'Parteikontrollkommission', the organisation which contributed to the forced collectivisation of the village farms (GA, 70), and the old teacher, who had taught most of the people in the village (GA, 33). The choice of these two figures seems to be quite significant, as she is sure to find in them conversation partners nostalgic for the past, who, as in her

case, find it difficult to come to terms with the transformations which are taking place because of their strong attachment to the GDR.

Although she is advised against accepting Fricka's invitation, she nevertheless pays her a visit because she knows that she can have a conversation with her without having to explain too much. Even if Fricka is the one who is really in need of solidarity, due to the isolation now surrounding her in the village, the fact that the two women share the same sadness for what happened to their dreams and aspirations gives them both the feeling of still belonging to a community. This mutual understanding is, for instance, exemplified by the fact that during their meeting they refer to socialism as 'die Sache' (GA, 70). They know they can be honest to each other and that their justifications for how they acted in the past are understood and accepted. More importantly, they can show their pride in their past achievements, as demonstrated by Fricka getting out the newspaper cutting with her poem and giving it to her guest as a present.

While she feels almost obliged to go and see Fricka probably because of an old feeling of loyalty towards other members of the Party,²⁷ the meeting with the teacher is more a reaction to her difficulty to relate to Thuringia in the 1990s and an occasion to immerse herself in her memories of the past. The teacher was in fact one of the main figures of her childhood. During their encounter she has the opportunity to recall some of the events of her time at school. While she starts remembering that her first approach to socialism was a response to propaganda in school, which she had learnt to reformulate in her homework in order to get a good mark, this stimulates her to reflect more closely on this process.²⁸ In this context, she

²⁷ This seems to be confirmed by the fact that after she reads the poem, she is moved and tells Fricka that it sounds like something she could have written. Although she regrets saying it, it is clear that her intention is to offer the woman some solidarity and consolation for the loss that they both have just experienced (GA, 71).

²⁸ See also note 59 of Chapter 3, where I briefly mention how Königsdorf deals with the issue of education.

discovers for example that the religious aspects attached to being a member of the Party, as discussed in the previous section, had characterised her attitude to socialism right from when she first came into contact with it: 'Wenn ich mir die "wahren" Kommunisten vorstellte, hatte ich das gleiche fromme Gefühl im Bauch, wie wenn ich an Jesus dachte' (GA, 36).²⁹

Instead of giving her back a sense of belonging, both the encounters with Fricka and with the teacher, and the visit to Thuringia in general ultimately open up many new questions on her past deepening her identity crisis. This reaches such proportions that the protagonist decides to take refuge in the hospital for a while where she hopes to be able to put some distance between herself and the outside world in order to reflect on her life and her past choices. Significantly, after her hospital stay as she is finally ready to move on, she feels the desire to say goodbye to both Fricka and the teacher as a sign that she has decided to leave nostalgic feelings behind and look to the future instead. However, while she is able to see Fricka off, she does not have an opportunity to meet the teacher, who, almost as a symbol of the old generation deserting the battlefield after having fought their battle, has just passed away.

This new vortex of questions to which the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* is drawn also corresponds to Königsdorf's personal experience, since the trip to Thuringia was not just a way to win back her sense of homeland, but also a stimulus to assess her past. In her essay 'Thüringen, du mein lieb Heimatland' Königsdorf tells of her visit to the graves of her relatives, the old acquaintances she comes across and her childhood memories. All of this is mixed with her new impressions of Thuringia, which was also transformed by the events of 1989-90, and

²⁹ I discussed the political development of Königsdorf as it emerges from *Gleich neben Afrika* in more detail in section 3.3.4.2.

therefore could not be the home which Königsdorf had hoped to find there (DC, 41).

All in all, the journey to Thuringia convinced Königsdorf that she could not recreate the same feelings of being at home that she experienced before 1989. The collapse of the GDR did happen and it must be acknowledged, as there can be no long-term refuge from it in a world of nostalgic memories. However, while the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* keeps wandering around in search of a new homeland which she will never find, Königsdorf was able to face reality and accept that her new relationship with her homeland had become 'vertraut und zugleich fremd' (DC, 43). The demise of the GDR certainly represented an end, but could also be seen as a new beginning. It is with the optimistic observation that: 'Immer wieder beginnt etwas Neues' (DC, 43) that Königsdorf's concludes her essay about her journey to Thuringia.

At this stage, even if Königsdorf had not been able to identify her region as her home, she had nevertheless come to terms with the uncertainty of her situation. In this context, what is also interesting to note is that in the general quest for identity following unification, there were other former GDR authors, who stressed their identification with their home region or even with the town in which they lived. An example of an intellectual who has increasingly concentrated on local identity³⁰ is Günter de Bruyn, as demonstrated by the regional awareness emerging from his collection of essays *Mein Brandenburg* published in 1993.³¹ In these writings it is

³⁰ Although Günter de Bruyn was born in Berlin, he started developing feelings of attachment to the Mark in his youth, which for him represented independence and the possibility of establishing close contact with nature. Such feelings grew stronger when from 1946 to 1949 he was sent there to teach. At the end of the 1960s he built himself a house south west of Frankfurt an der Oder where he still spends most of the year. See Kube L., 'Mein Brandenburg: Zur Konstruktion regionaler Identität in essayistischen Arbeiten Günter de Bruyns' in Tate, D. (ed.), *Günter de Bruyn in Perspective, German Monitor 44* (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), 119-131 (here 119).

³¹ Bruyn, G. de, *Mein Brandenburg* (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1993).

evident that he identifies with the Mark not only because he lives there, but also because of his involvement with its history and literature, which is already visible in his novel *Märkische Forschungen* written in 1978.³² The fact that de Bruyn's regional identity started developing during the GDR era explains why after 1989 he was not faced with the same identity crisis as Königsdorf. While 'sein Bekenntnis zur brandenburgischen Heimat vom Politischen und Staatlichen völlig gelöst sei',³³ Königsdorf identified her homeland with the GDR as this embodied her political goals. Therefore, whereas in 1990 she lost her homeland, de Bruyn did not. This also leads to another main difference between de Bruyn's and Königsdorf's regional identities. In Königsdorf's case, she was disappointed with Thuringia because it failed to replace the sense of home that characterised her relationship to the GDR. By contrast, for de Bruyn Mark Brandenburg has for much longer been his only form of identification, which he has chosen for himself and cultivated through the study of its history and literature.

Another author who has preferred to concentrate on her immediate surroundings is Irina Liebmann, as shown by her work *In Berlin*. Here she presents the life of an autobiographically based female character from the 1980s to the first post-unification years. Although she does not examine in particular issues of homeland, it is clear that Berlin is what she defines as

³² This novel deals with the research carried out by a famous historian and by an unknown provincial schoolteacher on the forgotten poet Max von Schwedenow from Mark Brandenburg. When they first meet, the historian is quite keen to exploit the findings of the schoolteacher. However, things change radically as the latter discovers that instead of being a revolutionary, von Schwedenow had instead led a double life as a conservative under the name of Maximilian von Massow. Since this contradicts the theory of the historian, who in the meanwhile has written a book on the subject entitled 'Ein märkischer Jacobin', he sticks to his version to protect his career with the excuse that the image he portrays of the poet is an inspiring example for his readers. Historical objectivity is then left on one side. In the end, as the schoolteacher still tries to publish his version for truth's sake, the historian unscrupulously sets out to undermine him. See Bruyn, G. de, *Märkische Forschungen: Erzählung für Freunde der Literaturgeschichte* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1996), first published in 1978.

³³ Kube L., 'Mein Brandenburg: Zur Konstruktion regionaler Identität in essayistischen Arbeiten Günter de Bruyns' [see note 30 above], 120.

‘die Landschaft ihrer Gedanken’,³⁴ and therefore the background to who she is. The fact that Liebmann decided to leave the GDR in 1988 is probably one of the factors why she focuses on the city of Berlin, as a strategy to avoid having to come to terms with a homeland that she rejected and a country which is not hers.

Königsdorf as well made a brief attempt to adopt Berlin as a reference point to define her identity.³⁵ She even describes herself as a Berliner and asserts that she is proud of the city as one is of its children. However, while describing her relationship to Berlin, she does not give the impression of having abandoned a specific East German perspective. For instance, she points out that the city is being transformed, but, as opposed to Liebmann’s character who changes herself with the city,³⁶ Königsdorf is scared that there might not be any more space left for her. Thus, because of the fear and the frustrations attached to Berlin, which in her opinion is being changed almost without the consent of its citizens, the experiment to identify with it remains isolated.

4.3.2 Identity and Experience

The failed experiments of 1990 seemed to convince Königsdorf that before looking for identification or a sense of belonging in politics or in a geographical place, she had to come to terms with her individuality. In order to do this, she first of all had to define her relationship to her past.

³⁴ Liebmann, I, *In Berlin* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994), 156.

³⁵ See the essay ‘Ostern bleibe ich in Berlin’, in RW, 25-27.

³⁶ Helga Königsdorf and Irina Liebmann came into contact with each other, at least indirectly, in 1991 when Liebmann wrote a letter to the *Berliner Zeitung* in response to Königsdorf’s article ‘Die Wurzeln der Gewalt’. Liebmann criticises Königsdorf for not giving things their real name, and for removing the responsibility from the individual. In other words, she accuses her of not defending enough the democracy that they have finally achieved. See Königsdorf, H., ‘Die Wurzeln der Gewalt’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 21.10.1991 and Liebmann, I., ‘Wer ist “man”, und wer sind “die Leute”’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 25.10.1991. However, the debate did not stop here. Daniela Dahn also got involved. The three points of view of these writers were neatly brought together by Heinz Klunker in an article entitled ‘Für Phantasie und Vision’, which appeared in *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 29.11.1991.

This is particularly important if we take into consideration that part of her identity crisis was also provoked by the discovery that she had refused to acknowledge that in reality she was supporting a dictatorial regime. This is why, after trying to fill in the gap left by the GDR with instant alternatives, she started formulating concepts of identity in which the focus is the individual and his/her experience. This is a very significant stage in her evolution since it was the moment in which she gained self-confidence and acquired the courage to recognise who she was and where she came from. Therefore, as she learnt to focus more on her independent self, the identity which she progressively built for herself could certainly be influenced by external events, but not swept away.

On these grounds, in her 1989-90 writings she puts forward a concept of individual identity which has to be flexible, as we are supposed to adjust continuously our relationship to the outside world. This does not however imply instability. On the contrary, the essence of identity, which is the individual and his/her store of experiences, is able to renew itself constantly, in a way in which through every new experience it reaches a new balance and finds a new stability in an ongoing and enriching process.³⁷ In Königsdorf's words:

Wir müssen uns ihr [der Welt] stellen, und während wir das tun, begreifen wir zugleich, daß dies der Weg ist, Identität zurückzugewinnen. Während wir tastend unser Verhältnis zur Außenwelt neu bestimmen, finden wir uns wieder und zugleich auch neu. Dann entgegen allen Wunschprognosen bleiben wir und unsere Erfahrungen. Und die bringen wir ein. (DC, 83)

Such a politically and culturally independent concept of identity can be viewed as Königsdorf's reaction to the crisis she suffered because of her attachment to the GDR as the embodiment of her political values, and

³⁷ See also the introduction of the concept of identity in section 0.3.

therefore as a measure of self-protection which she adopts to make sure that in the future she will not lose a sense of who she is.

In addition, this concept of identity serves to counteract the demonisation of the GDR, which started in the years 1989-90. This is not just one of the last traces of the commitment which Königsdorf felt towards the GDR, or the need to defend a project in which she had invested a lot of her energy. It was mainly fear of the consequences which the humiliations inflicted on the Eastern Germans in the process of unification could have that motivated her to focus on the significance of every experience. In this light, in her writings she points out that previous historical examples show how collective humiliations can often lead to the resurgence of feelings of intolerance as a means of compensating for the loss of self-confidence. Hence, as a response to the Western German condemnatory attitude towards the GDR past, Königsdorf recalls the situation of Germany after the Second World War, when the country was given the chance to start afresh. Now, she invites us to reflect on this aspect of German history, as she is convinced that, instead of being humiliated, the new federal states too deserve the opportunity of a new beginning.³⁸ Furthermore, she adds that the political experience which the Eastern Germans accumulated in forty years should no longer be regarded simply as a mistake, but rather as an experience from which both they and Western Germans should learn.

Thus, the importance of an identity based on experience lies in the fact that it guarantees continuity and renewal at the same time. In this sense, neither the Eastern Germans as a group nor as individuals need to reject their past. On the contrary, they should learn from it and have the

³⁸ This idea is expressed both in 'Das Recht auf Identität und die Lust zur Intoleranz', in DC, 83-88 (here 86) and in 'Überleben wäre eine prima Alternative', in RW, 57-68 (here 62-63).

courage to change. Only in this way does the past stop being a burden and become a form of richness:

Ehe er sich versieht, hat der Mensch, der eben noch Kind war, eine Biographie, und nichts ist auslöschar, nichts wiederholbar. Er schleppt alles, was war, wie eine Kette mit sich. Aber es ist nicht nur eine Behinderung, sondern auch der Schatz seiner Erfahrungen. (DC, 84)

4.4 The Post-Unification Years: Königsdorf's Experimentation with Ideas which Help Her to Define Her Identity

Although her definition of identity as based on one's experience helped Königsdorf to define her relationship to her GDR past and gain some self-confidence, it did not entirely solve the question of her identity and sense of belonging to the new environment in which she lived. In fact, in the first post-unification years her identity as a citizen did not seem to be more clearly defined than in 1990, as she was still experimenting with different concepts. Nevertheless, what is interesting to note about this period is that her main difficulty seemed to be the definition of the environment to which she wanted to relate, as she kept shrinking and enlarging it. Sometimes she placed herself in relation to a small community, at other times she tried to normalise her relationship to unified Germany, even seeing herself as belonging to the world as a whole. For this reason, my examination of Königsdorf's identity as a citizen in this period is based around three main concepts: the development of a sense of belonging within a small community, within the international community, and the acquisition of national identity. These three different dimensions will be examined in this order because my analysis shows that the first two are the extreme poles reached by Königsdorf in trying to solve her crisis and both have already been explored in the preceding works. Königsdorf's idea of the small community followed her experience with Thuringia, while the tendency towards internationalism was already present in *Respektloser Umgang*. By contrast, the investigation of issues such as the meaning of being German emerges only in the post-unification writings, almost as a desire to

normalise her attitude to her nationality, after forty years of the GDR in which the word German was practically eliminated.

4.4.1 Königsdorf's Ideas on Decentralisation

As mentioned above, Königsdorf's idea that it is easier to feel at home within a small community started developing at the time of her journey to Thuringia. This experiment was followed by her brief attempt to establish a relationship to the city of Berlin. In the post-1989 period, after both Thuringia and Berlin failed to fulfil her need to belong, she showed that she was still convinced of the advantages of a small community. This was conceived as a solution to the alienation³⁹ from the federal government, especially experienced by those having difficulties in integrating themselves into unified Germany, a problem which, in Königsdorf's view, might have led to the resurgence of nationalistic feelings (RW, 120). This explains why in her post-unification non-fictional writings she starts exploring ideas on decentralisation as an attempt to give her fellow-citizens a sense of belonging and a sense of tradition. In her opinion, centralisation has created enormous bureaucratic organisations where the individual feels degraded to the status of a number. Her suggestion to create smaller communities seems therefore a response to the anonymity and lack of transparency characterising contemporary society:

Meine Vision ist eine demokratische Weltordnung. Eine Demokratie, [...] in der dem einzelnen, durch möglichst weitgehende Dezentralisierung der politischen und sozialen Strukturen, wieder überschaubare Zugehörigkeiten angeboten werden, in denen er nicht zur austauschbaren Nummer wird, sondern im Gegenteil, wo es auf ihn ankommt. (RW, 121-122)

In particular in the essay 'Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt', decentralisation is aimed at the least fortunate within society, who need to

³⁹ In section 3.4.3 I presented the collection of interviews, *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, as an example of how Königsdorf tries to fight back against alienation by giving ordinary citizens the possibility of talking about their experience of life in unified Germany.

feel the protection of the group they belong to. In this framework, she proposes that some social services, such as for example the care of the elderly and of children, education or the integration of foreigners should be the responsibility of the local government. Hence, she gradually shrinks the borders of the space with which she hopes to identify herself, going from the region to the city and from this to the local authority district. However, there is a fundamental difference between her first two experiments and this most recent idea since the latter remains on a theoretical level. While she made the attempt to gain a sense of belonging to Thuringia and tried to identify with Berlin, the idea of decentralisation remains purely a political concept, a suggestion aimed at promoting democratic values within society.

4.4.2 Königsdorf's International Attitude

If at the one end of the wide spectrum of experiments undertaken by Königsdorf in order to solve her crisis there is that of identification with a small community, at the other end there is the adoption of an international attitude. Such an attitude emerges from most of the essays in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, in which Königsdorf concerns herself with issues of global relevance, such as environmentalism, and tends to present herself as a citizen of the world rather than as one with a specific national identity.

The identity which she assumes in these essays is based on universal and humanistic values underlining the importance of human life independently from political, social or cultural differences dividing mankind into groups. The nuclear threat of the 1980s convinced Königsdorf in *Respektloser Umgang* of the necessity of an international effort to put an end to the Cold War. Similarly, as the ecological threat of the 1990s also endangered the entire globe, in her essays she puts forward again the view that it makes no longer sense to keep up political or cultural barriers. According to her, all people across the globe live in the same dangerous

situation to which no remedy can be provided unless everybody is ready to co-operate: 'Wir sitzen aber alle auf demselben Ast. Und wir sind dabei, uns diesen Ast abzusägen' (RW, 11).

For this reason, she stresses the importance of maintaining a 'ganzheitliches Weltbild' (RW, 119) going beyond one's national borders, especially as she realises that the disappearance of the Iron Curtain could give rise to nationalistic feelings. Thus, in her writings she tries to counteract such feelings, underlining the fact that from an historical point of view the nation has no longer an important role to play, since the problems affecting the world can only be solved internationally. In this light, the present seems the least appropriate moment to assume a national identity:

Ganz natürlich werden die Menschen sich wieder stärker auf ihre nationale Identität besinnen. Und das gerade in einem Moment, da die Grenzen des Wachstums erreicht sind, da das ökonomisch-soziale Gefälle in Europa, ich spreche von dem ganzen Europa in seinen geographischen Grenzen, so groß ist wie nie zuvor, in einem Moment, da die Welt klein wird und die anstehenden Probleme nur gemeinsam gelöst werden können. In einem Moment, da es in den östlichen Ländern viele Gründe für Ängste und Verunsicherungen gibt. (DC, 87)

In accordance with her idea that contemporary problems can only be tackled on an international level, she proposes the introduction of international structures facilitating and co-ordinating the collaboration of the various countries. For example, she believes that 'Internationale Parlamente, Banken, und Kreditvergabe und ebenso das Aushandeln von Restriktionen, Kostenpflichtigkeit von Umweltnutzung und so weiter müssen sehr schnell wirksam werden' (DC, 106).⁴⁰ In this light, it does not come as a surprise that she is not interested in German internal affairs. On the contrary, her concern is about the role that Germany is going to play as an international actor in contributing to the solution of global problems:

⁴⁰ See also 'Lieben Sie Schmetterlinge?', in RW, 9-15 (here 15).

Ich möchte von den Politikern wissen, welche Vorstellungen sie über den Beitrag unseres Landes zur Korrektur der weltweiten Strukturen, zum Ausbau eines weltweiten politischen Systems haben. Denn es stehen Aufgaben vor der Menschheit, die alle Ländergrenzen überschreiten, die alle im Zusammenhang stehen, die sich nicht voneinander getrennt lösen oder auf ein Territorium eingrenzen lassen. (RW, 14)

Ultimately, Königsdorf's international identity as it emerges from her post-unification writings enables her to apply to her contemporary world the ideas she had developed during the Cold War and from her experience as a citizen of the GDR. The solutions which she puts forward in the essays in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, calling for a common effort to rescue the world from the threat of ecological disaster, are clear reflections of her GDR background and echo many of her thoughts expressed in *Respektloser Umgang* in which she promotes the 'Mobilisierung der Humanität' (RU, 94) as the key to 'saving the world'. By stressing the importance of having to pool human resources, she also manages to move away from the negative overtones surrounding the concept of collective identity. While after unification the emphasis put on the community was seen as the cause which led to the repression of individuality in the GDR, Königsdorf redefines the idea of collective identity as the 'Ursprung der Zivilisation' and its chance for the future (RW, 46).⁴¹

It is then clear that the stratagem of adopting such an international identity has a double advantage. On the one hand, it solves her problem of belonging by declaring national feelings to be counterproductive. On the other hand, it enables her to preserve her GDR experience and recreate in this struggle to achieve the common goal of saving the world a feeling of belonging, probably similar to the one that she had earlier felt when engaged in the struggle for socialism. However, this was another self-deluding experience because Königsdorf soon had to acknowledge that,

⁴¹ I discussed Königsdorf's ideas on the importance of introducing a collective identity in detail in section 3.4.2.

although she regarded this as a matter of life and death, this mobilisation of citizens striving towards the same goal was not going to take place.

4.4.3 Königsdorf's Relationship to Germanness

Even though, as discussed above, Königsdorf's international attitude did play an important role in how she viewed herself as a citizen, it is also true that it does not represent the final answer to her identity crisis and her search for home. This is demonstrated by the fact that in the more recent essays included in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* she continues to explore the significance of being a German citizen within unified Germany. Her feelings about it at times appear contradictory. On the one hand, she still finds it difficult to define herself as German because of the negative historical associations and because of the way the GDR tried to do away with the concept of Germanness. Thus, Alice, for instance, when analysing the meaning of the word 'German', is still afraid of describing herself as being German:

[w]enn man sie gefragt hätte, ob sie sich als eine Deutsche fühle, hätte sie vielleicht, aus alter Gewohnheit, erst einmal abgewehrt. Sie hätte gelacht und behauptet, sie sei ein Indianer. Doch nach einigem Nachdenken hätte sie dann zugeben müssen, daß sie ein ziemlich deutscher Indianer war. (SR, 22)

On the other hand, Königsdorf would like to normalise her relationship to her national identity. In essays such as 'Ganz normal deutsch' or 'Es müssen nicht immer Lackbilder sein',⁴² she tries to define what it means to be German and which are the characteristics marking out the Germans. In this process, she becomes aware that, like Alice, she too has to admit to being fairly German: '[m]anchmal weiß man gar nicht, wie sehr man etwas ist, weil man sich nicht von außen sehen kann' (RW, 71). She also discovers that she no longer wants to feel embarrassed because of the

⁴² These are part of RW: 'Ganz normal deutsch', 71-74 and 'Es müssen nicht immer Lackbilder sein', 89-91.

mistakes that Germany made in the past, but simply be German without having to go to the extreme of either being proud or ashamed of it, the two excessive attitudes which have characterised German history in the twentieth century: 'Wäre es nicht an der Zeit, wir würden, statt wie ein manisch depressiver Organismus zwischen Nichtigkeit und Größe zu pendeln, versuchen, normal deutsch zu sein?' (RW, 73).

While Königsdorf's national identity does not yet appear as well-defined, in an interview with Günter Gaus in 1994 she states for the first time: 'Ich habe das Gefühl, ich kann mich hier [in dem vereinigten Land] einmischen, es gehört zu mir'.⁴³ Such a statement clearly indicates that after writing the above-mentioned texts, she did eventually develop a sense of belonging to unified Germany. The stabilisation of her identity as a citizen can also be seen in her fictional works. For instance, in her latest novel, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, she shows she has overcome the identity crisis which dominates her first two post-unification works *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, in which she still feels the necessity to explore issues such as the meaning of homeland.

Now, the fact that she no longer needs to define herself in terms of belonging enables her to drop her Eastern German perspective and set the story in a town which is described as any town in an industrial society and talk about a family which could be any family. The main theme is the human capacity to love, which is conditioned by the pressures of modern society, compared to the more unconditional form of love expressed by animals, in this case cats. While pets love individuals for the person they are, human beings seem incapable of such unselfish feelings; on the contrary, they appear to give love only when the person is 'liebenswert' (EG, 97) or when it is in their own interests. Through the exploration of the

⁴³ Interview with Gaus, 83.

universal theme of love Königsdorf's intention is to provide thought-provoking material and to criticise any society in the contemporary world in which materialistic values prevail. She limits herself to describing a widespread problem of modern society, the care of the elderly, but it is entirely up to the readers to recognise themselves within the characters and the situations described in the book.

4.5 Conclusion

The process leading to Königsdorf's definition of her relationship to her society, from the moment in which she realised she had lost her home to when she started feeling at home within united Germany, takes quite a long time, but in the end it seems to have had a successful outcome. Although Königsdorf largely discusses her identity crisis in her non-fictional writings, the fact that in the end she managed to find a new balance within her identity as a citizen only becomes evident in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*. Here the absence of the focus on the problematic of 'belonging' indicates that when Königsdorf wrote this novel she was feeling at home in united Germany and could raise issues while maintaining a certain distance, leaving to the readers the task of drawing their own conclusions.

In the light of the evolution of Königsdorf's identity as a citizen, it will be easier to understand her development as a creative writer, especially in the aftermath of unification. The three phases of stability, confusion and re-definition, which her identity as a citizen undergoes, are also reflected in the fictional works which I will discuss in the following chapter. Thus *Respektloser Umgang* is an example of the extent to which Königsdorf was embedded in the GDR, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* exemplify the period of confusion in which she insists on representing the Eastern German perspective, and *Die Entsorgung der*

Großmutter is the work in which she shows she has successfully solved the identity issue.

Although after the disorientation of the first post-unification years Königsdorf seemed to have accepted to be part of unified Germany, she nevertheless appeared to miss the feeling that her work was going to contribute to the realisation of a larger project, which after 1990 she saw in terms of society's development towards environment- and man-friendly goals. While in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* she still promotes the idea that the world could be saved and that intellectuals had a role to play in making people understand that it was high time to change their attitude if they wanted their children to have a future (RW, 122), as time went by she was increasingly disillusioned about the impact that her intellectual work was having on society.

Hence, what followed the wave of enthusiasm, which she displayed in the 1994 interview when she had just finished working on her essays putting forward ideas on how to solve the world's problems, was bitterness. While in this interview she stated that she felt at home within unified Germany, this needs to be seen in relation to a later interview in 1997, where she was much more negative. On the latter occasion, she said: 'Zum Beispiel wüßte ich schon, wie die Welt zu retten wäre. Aber ich behalte das für mich. Weil die Welt ja doch nicht gerettet werden will'.⁴⁴ In conclusion, the difference between her relationship to the GDR and to unified Germany seems to be the fact that in the first case her identification with the country was strengthened by her intellectual activity which gave her the impression of contributing to society.

⁴⁴ Königsdorf's interview with Jürgen Seidel, 'Die große Utopie ist vorbei, aber Hoffnung besteht noch', *Schweriner Volkszeitung*, 06.09.1997. She repeats the same idea in the interview 'Ich bin nicht reduzierbar auf die Krankheit', *Neues Deutschland*, 27./28.02.1999. I also discuss this point in the Conclusion.

Chapter Five

Königsdorf's Identity as a Creative Writer

5.1 Introduction

The author Wulf Kirsten, writing in the immediate aftermath of the 'peaceful Revolution', predicted that literature in the ex-GDR would develop in the following way: 'Jetzt werde es erst einmal "dokumentarische Literatur geben, Augenzeugenberichte, Protokolle. Aber die eigentliche literarische Verarbeitung in Romanen, Theaterstücken und Gedichten, das wird ein Weilchen auf sich warten lassen" '.¹ The development of Helga Königsdorf's literary career shows how accurate Kirsten's hypothesis was. Her first response to the events of 1989-90 were the two collections of articles, essays and personal documents, *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* and *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen*, followed by the collection of interviews with Eastern German citizens, *Adieu DDR*, presented in the previous chapters. After these first attempts to come to terms with the changes of 1989-90 through non-fictional works, in 1992 Königsdorf was able for the first time to deal with the consequences of unification in the novel *Gleich neben Afrika*, in which she concentrates on themes such as the loss of identity and of home. In the following year, Königsdorf published another novel, *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, in which she carries on the discussion of the themes already introduced in *Gleich neben Afrika*, focusing in particular on the problem of *Abwicklung* - the term used to indicate the dismantling of the GDR infrastructures following unification as a result of which many Eastern Germans lost their job.

With the definition 'creative writer' I refer to Königsdorf's literary identity as it emerges from her creative writings. As my main aim in this chapter is to analyse the way in which the collapse of the GDR cultural

¹ Cited by Emmerich, W., *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* [see note 7 of the Introduction], 478.

establishment affected in particular Königsdorf's fictional writings, I will not undertake an aesthetic consideration of Königsdorf's creative works, rather I will focus on the impact of the changes of 1989-90 on her conception of literature, her relationship with the readership and her definition of the writer's task, etc. as emerges in her novels.² In order to do this I will first analyse what I consider to be Königsdorf's most important work written during the GDR era, *Respektloser Umgang*.³ As some aspects of this novel have been discussed in the preceding chapters, such as Königsdorf's understanding of feminism and her relationship to science, I will restrict my examination in this context to those elements which best reflect the literary tendencies of the 1980s in the GDR.⁴ In this manner, it will be possible to adopt this work as a point of reference for gauging the repercussions of the changes of 1989-90 in the literary sphere on Königsdorf's understanding of herself as a writer and her approach to literature as reflected by her post-unification novels, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*.

² In the analysis of Königsdorf's fictional writings I do not include the short stories because they have already been largely discussed in Chapter 1 and 2. Another reason for not taking into account the short stories is the fact that Königsdorf's mainly adopted this genre before leaving her job at the Academy of Sciences [see section 2.1]. Therefore, as she wrote novels throughout her literary career, by concentrating on this genre, it is possible to draw a direct comparison between her approach to creative writings before and after unification.

³ The other novel published by Königsdorf before unification is *Ungelegener Befund*. Although I choose to concentrate mainly on *Respektloser Umgang* as *Ungelegener Befund* is an epistolary novel, written right at the end of the decade and therefore less representative, I will nevertheless refer to it in the context of Königsdorf's understanding of literature as a means of coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). I also discussed the homosexual aspect of this novel in sections 1.8 and 2.2.3 as a work revealing Königsdorf's concern with the role of science and the responsibility of the scientist.

⁴ I focus on this decade because Königsdorf only started writing in 1978 and therefore her work is not representative of the literary experiments reflecting the theories of Socialist Realism, which characterised the 1950s and 1960s. On the contrary, it emerges at a point in time when many of the GDR authors had already moved away from such ideas as they proved unsuitable for a discussion about the complexity of reality. To be more precise, in an interview Königsdorf specifies that she was uninterested in this kind of literature. Allegedly, she started feeling the desire to become involved in literary discourse only after reading Irmtraud Morgner's books, which display a strong tendency towards the fantastic. In Königsdorf's words: 'Da war die Sache mit dem sozialistischen Realismus gewesen. Ich konnte bei mir keinerlei Neigung zu positiven Helden entdecken. Aber nun las ich Irmtraud Morgners *Hochzeitsreise nach Konstantinopel* und merkte, daß sich die Kulturpolitik geändert hatte', interview with Frink and Stückrath [see note 3 of Chapter 2], 63. I drew attention to Morgner's influence on Königsdorf's works in section 1.3.2.

As these two later novels were published within a year of each other, and therefore both belong to the first wave of fictional works written in the new cultural landscape of unified Germany, it seems appropriate to analyse them together. In their examination it also seems important to take into account the apprehension with which Königsdorf must have faced the task of writing in this period. Apart from the hesitations originating from her unfamiliarity with the new environment, one should also consider the general climate of tension characterising the German cultural scene after 1990. Not only were these novels among the first examples of writing within unified Germany, but they also followed the so-called *deutsche-deutsche Literaturstreit* (German-German literature dispute), which, by condemning Eastern German writers as *Staatsdichter* (state poets), did not facilitate their integration into the literary discourse of the new Germany.⁵

On a more personal level, this was also the period in which Königsdorf had to come to terms with an important change of career, as in 1990 she left the Academy of Sciences and became a full-time writer. The uncertainties caused by having to make a living out of writing in an economic system she did not know and at a time when former GDR writers were being highly discredited, is therefore a further aspect of Königsdorf's new situation after unification. The pressure faced by Eastern German writers at this specific point in time was such that Königsdorf even deals with it sarcastically in *Gleich neben Afrika*. Here she ridicules both the exaggerated expectations placed on former GDR intellectuals and their new precarious financial situation by insisting that the protagonist of her novel, who is an unnamed former GDR writer, is going to write a best-seller.

A joint analysis of these works can also be justified on the grounds of their thematic similarity, for both novels tackle, often with great irony, the problems generated by the political, economic and social

⁵ I consider the German-German literature dispute in more detail in sections 0.1 and 3.1.

transformations brought about by unification. In addition, they are both instances of committed literature based on Königsdorf's conviction that writers have a social task to perform in maintaining a critical attitude towards society's development at any time and in any regime.

My analysis will be organised in two main parts. The first of these will deal with the elements of continuity linking these works to those written before unification and in particular to *Respektloser Umgang*. In the second part, I will focus on those aspects of the novels which can be related to the changes of 1989-90. In this fashion, I intend to demonstrate the transitional nature of these novels, for they still display features typical of the GDR literary discourse combined with the uncertainties distinguishing the post-unification years. Thus, on the one hand they have been conceived with the so-called *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion* - that is the task of replacing the media -⁶ and the function of providing aid to living (*Lebenshilfe*)⁷ in mind. On the other hand, however, my examination of these two novels also shows that for instance the partly provoking, partly encouraging tone pervading Königsdorf's pre-1989 works has been replaced by a consoling voice, offering solidarity rather than challenging the attitudes and the values of her readers, denouncing unjust situations instead of encouraging self-criticism. While I will try to single out the reasons behind such developments, I will also investigate other aspects of the novels reflecting the impact of the events of 1989-90 on Königsdorf's work, such as the new sense of hopelessness and resignation now characterising her work and her disorientation vis-à-vis the new Germany.

⁶ See note 37 of the Introduction.

⁷ The first one to draw attention to this aspect, which in many instances described one of the main functions of literature in the GDR, was Irmtraud Morgner. In her work *Amanda*, in the text 'Brief aus der Not', a woman writes a letter to a philosophy magazine highlighting the fact that literature is the only sphere within society offering help to people, especially to atheists, to deal with the 'unerbittliche[n] Wechselfälle des Lebens'. See Morgner, I., *Amanda* [see note 40 of Chapter 1], 152-153.

The last part of this chapter consists of a discussion of Königsdorf's latest novel, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, which appeared in 1997. This work seems to represent a noteworthy development from the two above-mentioned novels mainly because, as previously discussed, it focuses on themes other than the problematic relationships between East and West Germans. Since the passing of time has provided Königsdorf with a certain distance from the geographical and psychological German-German border, in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* her identity as a creative writer appears to have positively evolved from the sense of disorientation which manifested itself in *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*.

As in this work the differences between the Eastern and Western perspectives are no longer significant, Königsdorf returns to her preoccupation with human beings and their development within any modern society, for instance by discussing the theme of love or rather the lack of it in the contemporary world. This implies that *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* too is an example of committed literature, however more in line with the pre-1989 fictional writings than with the post-unification novels because of the universality of themes and also the provoking tone adopted here.

Königsdorf's most recent novel can furthermore be read as an example of the Cassandra function⁸ of literature because of the way in which it combines a warning with a message of encouragement. Strictly speaking, if we consider that *Respektloser Umgang* was written in 1986 and Königsdorf articulated the concept of the Cassandra function of literature only in 1987,⁹ then we can regard *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* as the

⁸ I introduced the Cassandra function of literature with regard to *Respektloser Umgang* in section 2.2.3.3.

⁹ Königsdorf formulated this concept for the first time in her contribution to the Tenth Writers' Congress of the GDR, which took place on 24.11.1987. For more details see note 5 of the Introduction. To clarify my argument, I would also like to cite again Königsdorf's exact formulation of her understanding of the Cassandra function of literature: 'Nicht die Kassandra, die das Unheil weissagt und keinen Glauben findet, sondern eine Kassandra, die nichts beschönigt und

only novel in which this idea has been consciously translated into literary form. This is therefore a further element which brings *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* closer to the pre-1989 works than to *Gleich neben Afrika* or *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*. On the basis of these continuities, I will argue that this novel is the work in which Königsdorf shows that she has gained a better insight into the changed literary discourse of unified Germany, for she was able to update some of the features which defined her literary profile during the existence of the GDR, while dropping others made redundant by the recent transformations in the cultural landscape.

5.2 *Respektloser Umgang*: Königsdorf's Achievement of a Stable Identity as a Writer in the GDR

My analysis of *Respektloser Umgang* is chiefly based on three aspects, which Peter Peters¹⁰ identifies as the most distinctive of the development of GDR literature especially in the last two decades of its existence, the period in which Königsdorf was part of the literary establishment of East Germany. These include the conviction that it was possible to contribute to the realisation of socialism 'with a human face' through literature, the increasing focus on the development of the individual, and the attitude towards history, by which I mean both the importance attributed to the process of coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) and to contemporary history lived as a direct individual experience.¹¹

die trotzdem ermutigt, sich gegen das Unheil zu wehren' (MS, 8).

¹⁰ See Peters, P., "'We are one book': Perspectives and Developments of an All-German Literature", in Williams, A. and Parkes, S. (eds), *The Individual, Identity and Innovation* [see note 55 of Chapter 1], 297-314 (here 305).

¹¹ When discussing the awareness of history as a feature of GDR literature, Peters mainly concentrates on the idea of contemporary history lived as a direct experience, rather than on that of literature as a space in which to deal with the past, which is the point I choose to emphasise. While in the context of Königsdorf's identity as a creative writer, I believe it is important to underline her desire to confront the past, a desire also felt by many other GDR writers especially in the 1970s and 1980s, Peters does not need to draw attention to this point for the purpose of his article. In its treatment of the theme of confronting the past the GDR literature of the 1970s and 1980s does not match with the literature of the FRG, where the subject had predominantly been dealt with in the 1950s and 1960s. In section 5.2.3, I present the reasons why the process of coming to terms with the past started later in the GDR.

5.2.1 The Contradictions within GDR Literature

The first observation to be made with regard to Königsdorf and many intellectuals of her generation - including Christa Wolf, Christoph Hein, and Volker Braun - is the fact that their writings reveal the contradictory nature of their position as believers in socialism and at the same time as critics of their society's progress. This contradiction became particularly evident when many intellectuals, including Königsdorf, interpreted the Revolution of 1989 as the opportunity to introduce the so-called 'Third Way' of democratic socialism after years spent criticising the system. This clearly demonstrates that up until then they had retained their belief in the socialist utopia, which they hoped to realise by stimulating change within the system. It also explains why their writings became examples of internal constructive 'criticism aimed at social conditions in order to realise the ideals on which they rested, i.e. by freeing these ideals from the debasement in the existing real order'.¹² In this sense, every piece of critical writing represented a small contribution towards the achievement of the socialist goal of creating a 'society with a human face'. As Königsdorf herself commented in this respect:

Wir glaubten an die Möglichkeit ihn [den Sozialismus] von innen her zu reformieren, ihn zu bessern. An die Möglichkeit, der schönen Utopie ein Stück näher zu kommen. Eine Liebe dauert so lange, wie man sich ein Bild vom anderen machen kann, das einen kleinen Traum zuläßt. Bleibt nichts mehr offen, geht die Liebe zu Ende. Wir akzeptierten es nicht, das System, das uns umgab, aber wir liebten die Utopie, die es einst auf seine Fahnen geschrieben hatte. Und wir hatten immer noch die Hoffnung, wir könnten irgendwie dahin gelangen.

Dafür schrieben wir, waren wir listig, verbündeten uns zeitweilig sogar mit den Gegnern unserer Hoffnung. (DC, 33)

Respektloser Umgang is an example of this contradiction marking the cultural discourse in East Germany as it is a piece of criticism vis-à-vis the values which the GDR's performance-oriented society seemed to promote. According to Königsdorf, the high standards set by society had the effect of

¹² Ibid., 305. I also underlined this point in section 3.2.1.

directing people's efforts towards only temporarily satisfying goals such as success and recognition. To these ephemeral ideals, she opposes the idea of life as a value in itself, in order to underline how quickly the significance of material things or mundane values pales once life is threatened. This is the discovery made by the protagonist of the novel after she finds herself to be suffering from an incurable illness: 'Die Gier nach den Dingen, nach Macht, nach Ruhm. Einmal wird alles verblassen, vor dem einfachen Wunsch zu leben' (RU, 115).

While in a paradoxical way she has to be grateful to her illness for making her aware of the value of her life,¹³ she also realises that life as a universal concept, which is too often taken for granted, could soon acquire a new meaning as a consequence of the nuclear threat hanging over the world. Therefore, while she is given the time to appreciate her life, she cannot be sure whether everybody will have the same chance. The question she asks herself, 'Aber wird es dann nicht zu spät sein?' (RU, 115), moves the focus from her personal case to that of society as a whole, and reveals Königsdorf's concern about the risks of a nuclear war or an ecological disaster, which could make it suddenly too late to start valuing life. By moving from an individual to a general case in order to illustrate the gravity of her contemporary situation, Königsdorf manages to criticise any attitude of disrespect towards life, starting from every human being's duty to respect himself and his milieu to the political manoeuvres behind the Cold War or those promoting progress at the expense of the environment.

¹³ It is important to note that the theme of the illness can be interpreted as an autobiographically based element since Königsdorf has been suffering for many years from Parkinson's disease. She talks about her illness in the article 'Seele auf dem Operationstisch', in RW, 101-106. In this text, in which Königsdorf's profound appreciation of life becomes evident, she describes the role the illness has been playing in her life in the following words: 'Krankheit gehört zu meinem Leben. Und die Bilanz ist durchaus nicht nur negativ. Alle Peinlichkeiten und Ängste kenne ich schon. Manches, was andere aus der Fassung bringt, kann mich nicht erschüttern. Ich fahre jedes Jahr zum letzten Mal ins Gebirge. Für mich ist morgen schon heute. Ich habe gelernt, ganz da zu sein, wo ich bin. Ich habe gelernt, gut mit mir umzugehen. Ohne die Krankheit hätte ich vielleicht nie begonnen zu schreiben' (RW, 102). I mentioned this text also in section 3.4.2. At the same time, Königsdorf also points out that one of the reasons why she started writing was the frustration she experienced in dealing with the rationality of mathematics, as discussed in section 2.4.

Although *Respektloser Umgang* is clearly a piece of writing confronting the fact that the development of socialist society is diminishing the respect for life, it is also true that the criticism it puts forward could be directed against any other industrial society. This is certainly indicative of Königsdorf's primary concern with human problems and not solely with issues specific to the GDR. Especially the fact that she deals with the Cold War by drawing attention to the significance of a universal value such as life, thus transcending the political and ideological differences between East and West, reveals her humanist attitude. This makes her part of what the critic Thomas von Vegesack defined as a humanist revolt,¹⁴ indicating the preference shown by GDR authors for viewing people as human beings rather than as the 'ensemble of social connections',¹⁵ as Marx defined them.

5.2.2 The Importance of the Individual

Another aspect of the humanist tendency displayed by *Respektloser Umgang* is Königsdorf's preoccupation with the development of the individual as a way to achieve self-realisation and fight back against the pressure of the GDR's performance-oriented society. This trend, which started with the publication of Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, in which the protagonist tries all her life to understand the meaning of 'Zu-sich-selber-kommen',¹⁶ continued to develop into the 1980s, as exemplified by works such as *Respektloser Umgang*. Here, in fact, Königsdorf insists on the importance of having a space to develop and exercise one's own individuality, regardless of society's expectations and its high standards. Her female figures in particular are examples of this struggle against the

¹⁴ Thomas von Vegesack made this comment on the occasion of the publication of Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* to indicate that the novel could be read as a protest against conformity, and not 'just' as a socialist text. See Brockmann, S., *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 26. In Chapter 1, I drew attention to the fact that Königsdorf's concern with women-centred issues can be best described as 'Individualhumanismus' as she focuses on the problems faced by women not because they are 'women's problems', but because they are 'human problems'.

¹⁵ Cited by Reid, J. H., *Writing without Taboos: The New Eastern German Literature* (New York; Oxford: Berg, 1995), 16.

¹⁶ This is the motto of the text, which was taken from Johannes R. Becher.

pressure to conform and display the courage to break free from conventional life models in order to find self-realisation. In the case of the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang*, for instance, after having spent her life trying to fulfil society's expectations, it is her illness which makes her realise that the only way to achieve self-fulfilment is to learn to accept one's limits, and respect oneself and others.¹⁷

However, the reasons behind Königsdorf's focus on the development of the individual are not only linked to her preoccupation with the shortcomings of the GDR's performance-oriented society. A concept which is first illustrated in *Respektloser Umgang*, but which Königsdorf continues to put forward also in her non-fictional writings after unification,¹⁸ is the idea that only a society formed by responsible and self-aware individuals can react to the gravity of the problems afflicting the globe. As previously mentioned, since she sees the solution to the Cold War, the nuclear threat and the environmental problems in 'die Mobilisierung der Humanität' (RU, 94), her concern with the individual is in relation to society's survival. Therefore, Königsdorf's attitude can neither be reduced to a protest against the idea of conformity imposed by the GDR regime nor to a simple celebration of individualism. On the contrary, her position reflects the socialist belief that a free and responsible society has to be formed by free and responsible individuals. She also stressed this concept of the importance of seeing oneself as an individual in order to be able to contribute to the well-being of society in the text she presented at the Tenth Writers' Congress in 1987 with the following words: 'Es ist verlockend, auf eine eigene Identität zu verzichten und in eine

¹⁷ This point is one of the core arguments of Chapter 1. For this reason I do not deal with it in great detail in this context.

¹⁸ See Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, and in particular the analysis of Königsdorf's non-fictional essays in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*. In these essays, Königsdorf expresses the point of view that the only way to fight against the global problems affecting the planet is to create a collective sense of responsibility. This implies making people aware of the global risks which the planet is running. Once this awareness is reached, Königsdorf hopes that people will also understand that it is in their own interest to start acting.

kollektive hineinzutauchen. Aber was ist eine kollektive Identität ohne eine Identität, die “Ich” einbringt!’ (MS, 9).

5.2.3 Understanding the Past

In order to develop one’s individuality, in Königsdorf’s view, it is fundamental to be able to see one’s life in relative terms.¹⁹ This implies above all the possibility of drawing a parallel between the present and the past and of acknowledging one’s origins, since, in this manner, one can set some parameters for judging one’s situation: ‘[...] die Erkundung des Ursprungs. Der Wurzeln. Nur durch die Relativierung des Ichs ist die eigene Existenz noch ertragbar’ (RU, 27). It is in this framework that we can explain Königsdorf’s preoccupation with understanding the past, and in particular the Second World War, as exemplified by *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*.

This need to face the past in order to be able to understand and assess oneself was particularly felt by Königsdorf’s generation in the GDR as a consequence of the fact that in the post-war years, instead of undergoing an honest confrontation with the Nazi past, East Germany stressed continuity with the legacy of the resistance movement. It proclaimed itself an antifascist state, the homeland of the victors of history,²⁰ and embarked on a radical process of de-Nazification. This myth made it possible to dismiss the questions of responsibility and of guilt for Nazi crimes and to shift them to West Germany.²¹ Even with regard to the

¹⁹ In section 2.2.3, I emphasised the fact that in defining the role which science should play within society Königsdorf uses examples from the past in order to illustrate the necessity for scientists to assume their own responsibility in the present time.

²⁰ The GDR’s claim to be inhabited by communist resistance fighters is unfounded: one has to take into account that the Socialists and Communists who in 1932 voted against the NSDAP represented 36% of the national vote, but that, as Stephan Doernberg reports, only 300.000 members of the Communist Party were against Hitler in 1933. Furthermore, he also states that only half of these survived the war. Therefore, in May 1945, when Germany was divided into two parts, 40 million of Hitler’s supporters and those who went along with Nazism happened to find themselves in West Germany and 10 million in the future GDR. See Dinter, I., *Unvollendete Trauerarbeit in der DDR-Literatur: Ein Studium der Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 18-19.

²¹ An example of the extent to which the GDR government declined any sort of responsibility is

Holocaust, the attitude was to direct attention to the West: 'Die Mörder sind bekannt. Die Blutspur führt nach Bonn'.²²

This highly distorted version of history was the official one adopted in the schools, as it presented the advantage of enabling the younger generations to identify themselves, without any problems of conscience, with the antifascist heroes. As she was born in 1938, it is very likely that the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* too had been educated to believe in the antifascist myth. However, during her childhood she does not seem able to identify herself with the heroes who put their life in danger in the name of communism. On the contrary, this constant confrontation with heroism makes her feel inadequate. On the one hand she admires them, but on the other hand she does not feel one of them, and is relieved to be living in a time when heroes are no longer needed (RU, 20-21). Ultimately, the fact that her grandmother was Jewish and that the anti-fascist myth is not enough for her to explain and dismiss what happened in the past contribute to her impression of being 'geschichtslos' which she defines in the following terms: 'Zu spät geboren, um mitschuldig zu werden. Zu betroffen, um Mitschuld nachträglich für möglich zu halten. Ohne Identifikation mit Vergangenheit' (RU, 20).²³

Regrettably, literature too became a means of spreading the myth of the GDR as a country of antifascist resistance fighters, in this way helping to spare its citizens the painful process of confronting the questions of guilt

given by the text of the pamphlet distributed to each visitor until 1990 at the entrance to Buchenwald: 'Der Widerstand des deutschen Volkes gegen die faschistische Diktatur und die Kriegsvorbereitungen [ist] Grund zur Errichtung der Konzentrationslager gewesen', and furthermore 'Kommunisten, Sozialdemokraten, bürgerliche Demokraten, Christen und Pazifisten, Kämpfer aller vom deutschen Faschismus unterdrückten Nationen litten und kämpften hier'. The fact that, in listing the victims, the focus is on the resistance fighters as opposed to the Jews for example or the gypsies, who, in much larger numbers, died in Buchenwald and are not even mentioned is in itself exemplary of the way in which the GDR distorted history and offended the memory of all the groups other than the communists who were victims of fascism. Ibid., 18-19.

²² Ibid., 19.

²³ I also discussed the conflict-ridden relationship between Königsdorf's generation and the Nazi past in section 4.2.

and complicity. This is exemplified by the antifascist texts²⁴ published in the late 1940s and 1950s, which dealt mainly with the theme of resistance, thus stressing the antifascist roots of East Germany. While in this period West German authors²⁵ had already started exploring the issues of individual guilt and responsibility, the self-proclamation of the GDR as the antifascist German state seemed to exclude the need for a literature aimed at coming to terms with the Nazi past. Furthermore, this was the time in which intellectuals felt called upon to contribute to the reconstruction of the country according to the socialist model. The *Bitterfelder Weg* in particular, promoted in 1959, directed the intellectuals' attention towards socialist achievements.²⁶

This first phase was followed by a period (from the mid-1950s onwards) in which the focus was shifted to the experience of young soldiers who, disillusioned with Nazism, converted to socialism, often during their imprisonment in the former Soviet Union. The depiction of the Third Reich in these works²⁷ is much closer to reality and moves away from the model of heroic communist resistance which, not surprisingly, did not reflect the experience of most citizens in the GDR. However, it was only in the 1970s that GDR writers started asking themselves those questions which had already been extensively discussed in the literature of the FRG since the 1950s. This change was without doubt facilitated by the new, even if short-lived, climate of intellectual openness inaugurated by Honecker on his

²⁴ Examples of these first works confronting the Nazi past are Anna Seghers's *Das siebte Kreuz* (first published in German in 1946) and Stephan Hermlin's *Die erste Reihe* (1951). A later example is Bruno Apitz's bestselling novel *Nackt unter Wölfen* (1959).

²⁵ See, for example, Heinrich Böll's *Billard um halbzehn* (1959), Alfred Andersch's *Die Kirschen der Freiheit* (1952) and *Sansibar oder Der letzte Grund* (1957) or Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* (1959).

²⁶ Although I stressed the fact that in this period GDR intellectuals were mainly preoccupied with contributing through their works to laying the foundations of their socialist state, there are nevertheless exceptions of works written in the 1960s, which, instead of concentrating on the *Bitterfelder Weg*, focused on analysing the Second World War, thus challenging the GDR's antifascist attitude. These include Johannes Bobrowski's *Levins Mühle* (1964) and Jurek Becker's *Jakob der Lügner* (1969).

²⁷ See for example Franz Fühmann's *Kameraden* (1955) and *Das Judenauto* (1962) and Dieter Noll's *Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt* (1960-63).

accession to power in 1971, and above all by the need of the younger generation to know more about the experience of their parents during the Nazi regime. The works of Franz Fühmann or Christa Wolf,²⁸ for instance, tackle fascism from a personal perspective, analyse the issue of responsibility and complicity and describe the everyday reality of people who lived during the Nazi regime.

It is in this last category of works that we can place both *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*, as both novels distance themselves from the propagandist distortion of history promoted by the GDR. They directly deal with issues of responsibility and resistance in the context of the protagonists' families, without excluding the possibility of their complicity in war crimes. As *Respektloser Umgang* in particular contains autobiographical elements, this lets us assume that, at a certain point in her life, Königsdorf might have felt the need to reflect on what really happened during the fascist regime and decided to do so through literature.²⁹

5.2.4 Historical Awareness of the Contemporary Situation

As anticipated above, one needs to reach historical awareness both of the past and the present in order to be able to influence the future positively. As Königsdorf states:

Für mich ist Geschichte immer mit Gegenwart und Zukunft verbunden. Man muß sie in ihrer ganzen Kompliziertheit annehmen. Und ich glaube, Literatur kann dazu beitragen, Geschichte heute produktiv zu machen.³⁰

The first part of this statement elucidates Königsdorf's conviction of the need to analyse the past in order to understand the present, and to be aware

²⁸ Fühmann, F., *22 Tage oder die Hälfte des Lebens* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), Wolf, C., *Kindheitsmuster* [see note 16 of Chapter 4]. Other examples are Klaus Schlesinger's *Michael* (1971) and Hermann Kant's *Der Aufenthalt* (1977).

²⁹ See also section 3.2.2.1.

³⁰ 'Das ist jemand, der kennt das auch ...', interview with Wagner, R., *Berliner Zeitung am Abend*, 19.01.1989.

of the present in order to be prepared to face the future. *Respektloser Umgang* exemplifies this indivisibility of past, present and future. As discussed in Chapter Two, the discussion of the issues of responsibility and resistance in the context of the Second World War is relevant to Königsdorf's present situation and serves as a guide to assuming one's own responsibility for the future. This suggests that Königsdorf felt directly involved in the historical events of her era and responsible for them. Her historical awareness is therefore based on the idea of having to play an active role within the historical process and the belief that she is in a position to influence it. This is shown by the fact that the nuclear and the ecological threats have a real impact on the life of the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* who launches herself into a struggle with the complexities of her contemporary situation. Although she could easily refuse to assume responsibility for what is happening in the world as she is terminally ill, she nevertheless accepts a final 'task', thus fulfilling what according to her is her sense of duty towards history: 'Mir ist genug Kreuz auferlegt. Ich könnte mich aus dem Staub machen. Aber ich habe einen Auftrag, und ich nehme den Auftrag an' (RU, 115).

The second part of the statement indicates the role which Königsdorf as a writer ascribes to herself within the historical process. She believes in having to act as the 'consciousness of the nation',³¹ that is to illuminate through her writings society's problems. In fact, it is by raising awareness that she can contribute to turning her ambitious solution directed at the 'Mobilisierung der Humanität' (RU, 94) into a reality.³²

Within the context of the GDR's cultural scene, Königsdorf's understanding of her role as a writer leads us to the conclusion that she had

³¹ This term is normally used to describe the role played by Heinrich Böll in particular and by the writers of the *Gruppe 47*, who supported the idea of committed literature.

³² See note 18 of this chapter. For a discussion of the suggestions she makes to 'save the world', see also sections 2.3.1.1 and 3.4.2.

internalised the fact that her works had to fulfil the so-called *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion* of literature, a consequence of the GDR's lack of an open public sphere. This is exemplified by *Respektloser Umgang*, which was one of the works written in the GDR to stimulate the debate about nuclear energy.³³ In her conception of literature, Königsdorf goes even further, in the sense that, in her opinion, writers should not just bring to light important matters ignored or glossed over by the official media, but they should also encourage the readership to find solutions. As previously discussed, Königsdorf associates this concept with the myth of Cassandra, whose unique ability, according to her, was not to see into the future, but to describe her present situation exactly as it was: 'In Wahrheit hat Cassandra nie etwas vorausgesehen. Sie sprach nur aus, was alle wußten. Aber niemand hatte mehr Lust, Troja zu verteidigen' (AD, 107). Furthermore, her Cassandra has the strength to assist in the fight against any approaching disaster. *Respektloser Umgang* is without doubt an example of how she encourages the readers first to reflect on their contemporary problems and then to act upon them by emphasising their sense of responsibility. In this manner, this work has a double effect on the readership, acting as awareness-raiser and at the same time as a stimulus to change the status quo.

It is interesting to note that in the 1980s the literatures of East and West Germany began to converge in a remarkable range of ways,³⁴ transcending the political differences between the two states. The extent of this cultural convergence became evident at the writers' meeting initiated

³³ Another work produced in the GDR which contributed to this debate was Christa Wolf's *Störfall: Nachrichten eines Tages* [see note 20 of Chapter 2], which was inspired by the explosion of a nuclear reactor in Chernobyl in April 1986.

³⁴ The term 'convergence' was first used by the Dutch economist Jan Tinbergen, the father of the convergence theory. This theory indicates the economic rapprochement of East and West, a phenomenon which could be observed as early as the 1960s. In this period, the economists started talking of a convergence of the two economic systems, as the liberal West increasingly orientated itself towards a welfare state and the East gradually started introducing more liberal measures. For more information on convergence theory, see Brockmann, S., 'Literature and Convergence', in Bullivant, K. (ed.), *Beyond 1989: Re-reading German Literary History since 1945* (Oxford; Providence: Berghahn, 1997), 49-67 (here 50-60).

by Stephan Hermlin in 1981 (*Berliner Begegnung zur Friedensförderung*),³⁵ in which, for the first time since 1947, intellectuals from both German states found themselves agreeing on the importance of pooling their resources to achieve peace, which, in this period of extreme political tension, had suddenly become a common goal. Stephen Brockmann sees this pan-German peace movement as the moment in which the East and West German writers felt bonded by a feeling of togetherness and mutual responsibility, generating a sense of cultural unity.³⁶ The preference given to themes rising above national borders, such as ecology and feminism, as well as Königsdorf's explicit aim to encourage fighting against the status quo, makes *Respektloser Umgang* a very good example of this cultural convergence, even if, as discussed above, it is also a work which displays many of the specific tendencies of the GDR literature of that time.

5.3 *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*: Königsdorf's Confused Identity in the First Post-Unification Years

Even though it might seem paradoxical, Königsdorf's concerns and ideas differed less from those of her colleagues in the West when the Wall was still a reality. As I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs with the analysis of her first two post-unification novels, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, her work came to assume a particular Eastern German cultural connotation in the first years after unification, since in this phase of her literary career Königsdorf preserved a separate Eastern German identity and perspective in her approach to literature. For this reason, her post-unification novels seem to be part of that literary phenomenon which Wolfgang Emmerich describes and characterises as follows:

Dieser neue Typus von Heimatliteratur hat einen hohen Identifikationswert, ist wie ein wärmender Ofen für die in die Kälte des Westens Entlassenen. Ja, man

³⁵ This first meeting was followed by a similar one in 1983.

³⁶ Ibid.

konnte (sic) sogar pointieren: Jetzt erst, nach dem Untergang der DDR, entstehe die wirkliche, die reine DDR-Literatur – ganz und gar freiwillig, ohne Parteauftrag und Zensur. Das ist natürlich stark übertrieben, und doch muß man wohl zur Kenntnis nehmen, daß aufgrund mentaler Kontinuitäten in den Autor- wie den Lesergemütern - und aufgrund der Kränkungen, denen diese gemeinsam ausgesetzt waren oder noch sind - eine literarische Tendenz weitergehen wird, die gänzlich unwestlich ist.³⁷

Gleich neben Afrika and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* are easily identifiable examples of this new literary tendency. They in fact display a mixture of elements of continuity with Königsdorf's pre-1989 work and new features, which mainly originate from her desire to provide that warm feeling mentioned by Emmerich for those former GDR citizens who, like her, are finding it difficult to come to terms with the recent changes. For instance, the fact that both *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* continue to perform the role of substitutes for the media (*Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion*) and have been conceived around the idea of literature as aid to living (*Lebenshilfe*) attest to the lack of development of Königsdorf's literary identity following the disappearance of the GDR. As discussed above, *Respektloser Umgang* is Königsdorf's contribution to the debate on officially ignored current issues and a form of help for those bewildered by more individual aspects of human life such as illness, or more general ones, such the need to confront Germany's Nazi past. Similarly, in these novels her aim is to point to post-unification problems, which according to her are not given enough attention in the media, and at the same time to offer solidarity to those who have felt humiliated by unification and its consequences. In other words, in all these works Königsdorf maintains the same attitude based on the importance for writers to raise critical awareness of past and present events, while helping their readers to understand or formulate what might seem very difficult or painful.

³⁷ Emmerich, W., *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, 503.

Among the main aspects of her literary profile which were strongly influenced by the events of 1989-90, there is, not surprisingly, the disappearance of the utopia, the realisation of which had always been the ultimate goal of Königsdorf's writings, resulting in the new sense of hopelessness and insecurity which characterises her post-unification novels. In addition to this, the other noteworthy change consists of the switch of focus from the individual to the group. Associated with the idea of literature as aid to living is that of giving the Eastern Germans as a cultural group a means of identification and support through literature. This leads Königsdorf to abandoning the provocative tone of her pre-1989 works in favour of a more consoling approach. The difficulties she was having in moving away from her GDR perspective are also reflected in the fact that old stereotypes and prejudices surface in these works.

5.3.1 Elements of Continuity in *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*

5.3.1.1 Literature as a Substitute for the Media (*Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion*) after Unification

Königsdorf was one of those authors who very soon realised what kind of impact the changes of 1989-90 were going to have on the literary landscape of East Germany. Not without pain, she acknowledged that the special bond between readers and writers, the reading between the lines, the queuing in front of the bookstores were all aspects of a cultural life suddenly made redundant by the collapse of the SED regime and its complex system of censorship. She also seemed aware that literature was bound to lose its prestigious position within society as the only public space in which taboo issues could be addressed. Yet, despite the fear of losing the feeling of 'being needed', Königsdorf welcomed the end of this over-reliance on literature - and consequently on its authors. Instead, she focused on warning against the dangers of continuing to burden literature with the so-called *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion* of providing information, a

task which could finally be returned to the sphere of the media. In Königsdorf's words:

Sie [Literatur] kann mit Möglichkeiten spielen und Modelle für das Beurteilen von Wirklichkeit anbieten. Mit ihrer Sensibilität für Erscheinungen kann sie auf alle Probleme der Welt schnell reagieren. Sie kann also vorpreschen und unbequem sein. Wird sie aber als Vorhut allein gelassen, wird ihr gar alles mögliche angetragen, was ihre Sache nicht ist, gerät sie leicht in zwielichtige Situationen. (MS, 78-79)

However, despite this new opportunity to allow literature to be 'just' literature, meaning that finally aesthetics could have the priority over information within the literary text,³⁸ in her post-unification novels, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, Königsdorf does not significantly change her approach. By contrast, even if her post-1989 works do contain some innovative elements,³⁹ they do not entirely reflect her new understanding of literature as expressed in the above formulation, but continue instead to display some traces of the above-mentioned *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion*.

Both works deal with everyday problems in post-unification Eastern Germany and illustrate the difficulties, the humiliations and the fears involved in the process of adaptation to the market economy. *Gleich neben Afrika* in particular tells about the difficulty of an East German writer who is going through an identity crisis both as a citizen and as a writer. In the background, Königsdorf portrays life after unification through numerous minor characters trying to cope either with unemployment, or with the pressure to remain 'credit-worthy', and in general with the double

³⁸ Christoph Hein expressed this concept with the laconic phrase: 'Literatur ist, wenn Proust mitteilt, wie er Tee trinkt', in Hein, C., *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* [see note 38 of Chapter 3], 183.

³⁹ This is particularly true of *Gleich neben Afrika* in which Königsdorf's decision to deal with lesbianism without turning it into a political issue exemplifies her belief that after the 'peaceful Revolution' it no longer made sense to continue ascribing the *Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion* to literature. However, this remains an isolated example of Königsdorf's determination to stop using literature as a substitute for the media since, as I show in this section, soon after unification Königsdorf loses faith in the media and the ability of the new society to discuss problematic social issues. For a discussion of Königsdorf's approach to the theme of lesbianism in *Gleich neben Afrika*, see section 1.8.2.

humiliation of having lived in a morally and economically bankrupt system and of now being dependent on Western Germany. In *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, the focus is on the consequences of the process of *Abwicklung* on four people, or rather, to use Königsdorf's expression, on four 'Gestrandete, die eine Gemeinschaft verband, von der sie wußten, daß sie nicht von Dauer sein würde' (SR, 9). In both cases, the choice of the subject matter indicates Königsdorf's conviction, as Dennis Tate has explained, that the situations she depicts in her fictional works have not been adequately discussed in other media.⁴⁰ Consequently, she sees it as her task to voice those social problems which, according to her, would not otherwise find expression, thus turning literature yet again into a public forum in which light can be thrown onto problematic issues.

This decision to continue allowing the dissemination of information to prevail over aesthetic values indirectly highlights how Königsdorf felt about unified Germany, and for this reason deserves further investigation. While it goes beyond nostalgic feelings impeding writers from moving away from the specific role played by literature in the GDR, it should be specified that Königsdorf's statement about the new role of literature dates back to the autumn of 1989, and therefore to a time in which the realisation of a society based on freedom and justice seemed within reach. As her non-fictional writings of the years 1989-90 show,⁴¹ the first wave of enthusiasm and hope was rapidly replaced by the pain caused by the demise of the GDR, but also by the way in which unification took place. In fact, Königsdorf sees the process of unification as a new source of humiliation for the Eastern Germans, who had just recovered their dignity through the 'peaceful Revolution'.⁴²

⁴⁰ Tate, D., 'Trapped in the Past? The Identity Problems of East German Writers since the *Wende*' [see note 29 of the Introduction], 10-13. Tate actually made this remark only with regard to *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, but it is my contention that it also applies to *Gleich neben Afrika*.

⁴¹ For a discussion of Königsdorf's different reactions to the period from the 'peaceful Revolution' to unification, see section 3.3.

⁴² For a discussion of Königsdorf's view on unification, see section 3.4.1.

It is evident then that Königsdorf's start in unified Germany was not marked by positive feelings. On the contrary, it seemed to be characterised by an attitude of distrust towards the new society and the market system. The fact that she could not trust people in her new surroundings is illustrated through a series of mysterious events threatening the life of the highly autobiographically based protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* - for example somebody throws stones and hay balls at her and once she is followed by an unknown car. It is not entirely clear whether some of these events happen in reality or are a product of the protagonist's 'Verfolgungswahn',⁴³ which is the expression Königsdorf's uses to explain the fear of those who held important positions during the GDR era that they might fall victim of acts of revenge. What is certain is that this was the time in which 'alle persönlichen Rechnungen beglichen [würden]' (GA, 103). Therefore, being all of a sudden in possession of the 'richtige[s] Parteibuch' (GA, 103) gave finally the opportunity to those discriminated against by the socialist regime to become the discriminators. Fricka, for example, who had been a member of the party establishment, is now so scared that she has a sign on her gate warning about a ferocious dog which she does not possess.

More importantly, however, Königsdorf developed feelings of distrust towards the new system, and in particular the media apparatus, which, according to her, was not much more effective than the old one in dealing with unpopular subjects. In Königsdorf's view, the GDR's many-layered system of censorship, which used to determine what could be published, was replaced by the market laws with the result that, even if in a very different way, she continued to feel restricted in her writing activity. Ironically, she probably felt less free at this particular point in time than

⁴³ Königsdorf uses this expression to describe her situation after writing the article on 'Menschenwürde oder Der Schlaf der Vernunft', published first in *Wochenpost*, 17.11.1989 and then in MS, 58-79, in a personal letter which also appeared in MS, 108. It is also contained in one of Königsdorf's diary entries as early as April 1989 (MS, 36).

ever before, since during the GDR regime she was at least familiar with the SED censorship and knew how to handle it.⁴⁴

Especially in *Gleich neben Afrika*, she talks about why, after having enjoyed the fact that during the 'peaceful Revolution' she could finally have access to new public forums as shown by the many newspaper articles she produced around this time, she is now finding it difficult to have her texts published:

Ich hatte sämtliche Zeitungen, von der *Prawda* bis zur *Frankfurter Allgemeinen*, mit Artikeln beglückt. Jetzt druckte mich nicht einmal mehr das *Neue Deutschland*, weil die Leser meine Artikel satt hatten. Aber auch weil die Redakteure Angst hatten, sich mit mir in die Nesseln zu setzen. (GA, 15-16)

She encounters similar problems when looking for an editor for her book because, as she sarcastically explains, 'ich hatte neunzehnhundertneunzig in Unkenntnis der Spielregeln zu viele Leute vor den Kopf gestoßen' (GA, 27). Not surprisingly, this kind of experience in the first years after unification, which showed Königsdorf the unwillingness of editors to go beyond what is easily marketable, helped to convince her of the inadequacy of the media apparatus as a whole to convey social issues in their full complexity.⁴⁵ This therefore explains why she again took upon herself after 1990 the task of throwing light through her literary works on the problems afflicting contemporary society.

⁴⁴ In this context, Königsdorf commented: 'Zwar war das Alte nicht akzeptabel, aber der Unsinn war wenigstens vertrauter Unsinn' (DC, 95).

⁴⁵ After unification many former GDR publishing houses ran the risk of having to close. In the attempt to compete with the West German publishing houses, many editors chose to restrict their activities to the publication of 'safe' titles. This explains at least in part the unwillingness to welcome new works encountered by Königsdorf in this period. See Sailer, T., *Ankunft im Supermarkt: Zur sozialen Situation der Autoren im Land Brandenburg* (Eggersdorf: Tastomat, 1993), 52. The difficult situation faced by the Eastern German publishing houses in the aftermath of unification is also discussed in Emmerich, W., *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, 438-444. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that while Königsdorf's books have always been published by Aufbau Verlag, its critical situation in the post-unification years is probably the reason which made Königsdorf publish *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen*, *Adieu DDR*, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* with Rowohlt. This seems plausible especially if we consider that after 1990 Königsdorf was relying entirely on her writing activity to earn her living and therefore could not afford to take a financial risk.

In particular, the fact that in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* Königsdorf continues to take over many of the functions of journalism has considerable repercussions on the novel by conferring upon it a certain documentary quality, to the extent that in a review Königsdorf was even defined as a 'chronicler' - 'Chronistin'.⁴⁶ In this sense, this work appears to be in line with her non-fictional works of 1990, especially *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* and *Adieu DDR*, in which she explicitly plays the role of the 'chronicler' by collecting official and personal documents as well as authentic testimonies regarding the 'peaceful Revolution' and unification.

5.3.1.2 Critical Elements: the Use of Irony and Parody

Despite this role of a 'chronicler' (in contrast to Christoph Hein who has been described as a 'Chronist ohne Botschaft',⁴⁷ Königsdorf, as I said earlier, seems to have a specific reason for acting as a 'Chronistin'), it would be wrong to assume that she has given up her critical spirit completely. As in her pre-1989 works, on the one hand *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* critically tackle those current issues ignored by the official. On the other hand, it is easy to see that they are not simple, objective observations of life in Eastern Germany. By contrast, they also present Königsdorf's personal perspective and her critical considerations on the issues she discusses. As in her pre-1989 short stories,⁴⁸ here too she often uses the weapon of irony and sarcasm to criticise the absurdities of the situation she is describing, whether she is talking about the GDR or the present day.

Thus, when the first-person narrator in *Gleich neben Afrika* says 'Es fiel uns nicht leicht, so zu werden, wie man uns brauchte' (GA, 15) or 'Es

⁴⁶ See Adam, G. B., 'Zuviel seelische Atmosphäre im Bauch', *Berliner Lesezeichen*, 02.11.1993.

⁴⁷ 'Chronist ohne Botschaft' is also the title of a collection of essays on Hein edited by Klaus Hammer. See Hammer, K. (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein: Ein Arbeitsbuch, Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1992).

⁴⁸ While irony is a feature of many short stories, it is not present in *Respektloser Umgang*, probably because of the different subject matter with which she deals here.

wäre ihnen lieber gewesen, man hätte sie, wenigstens der Form halber, gefragt' (SR, 7), it is clear that Königsdorf's intention is to comment sarcastically on the arrogance involved in the process of unification. Königsdorf also approaches the process of integration of the Eastern Germans into the market economy with great irony. By introducing the case of the landlord in *Gleich neben Afrika*, who was offered the possibility of taking a course on how to write an application form, after having worked for many years as an engineer, she illustrates the absurdities linked to the unemployment problem:

Kurz bevor er dann wirklich als arbeitslos galt, wurde ihm noch ein Kursus "Wie bewerbe ich mich" mit auf den Weg gegeben, in dem ihm fürsorglich das ganze Geheimrezept des Erfolgs gratis serviert wurde. Es war nun wirklich seine eigene Schuld, wenn er danach keine einzige Bewerbung mehr schrieb, sondern mit finsterem Groll einherging. (GA, 48)

This ironic situation is echoed in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, where the narrator observes:

Die Ostdeutschen waren entweder Reisekader gewesen oder ohne Auslandserfahrung. Beides war keine Empfehlung. Aber auch das war nicht die Schuld anderer. Wer es also in den nächsten Jahren nicht schaffte, würde wenigstens Zeit gehabt haben, zu begreifen, daß es nur an ihm selbst lag. (SR, 45)

Finally, Königsdorf does not hesitate to comment sarcastically on the mechanisms on which the GDR was based. Some of her observations are actually not entirely new, as they can also be found in her pre-1989 short stories, especially in those in which she exposes the shortcomings characterising the scientific environment. This is a further confirmation that during the GDR era, despite the fact that she was a member of the Party, Königsdorf never renounced her critical spirit. Thus, the way in which the GDR's bureaucracy allowed people to dismiss their responsibility, portrayed by Königsdorf for instance in 'Lemma I',⁴⁹ in which Johanna does not integrate herself into the science institute because

⁴⁹ For a more complete discussion of this story, see section 2.2.1. 'Lemma I' is part of MT, 15-26.

she takes every task she is ascribed very seriously in an environment where rhetoric and glossing over are common practice, is also mentioned in *Gleich neben Afrika*:

Früher war es für uns alle einfacher gewesen. Da bekamen wir gesagt, was zu tun und was zu lassen war. Blieben dennoch Zweifel, konnten wir nachfragen. Jeder konnte eine Verantwortung, die er nicht tragen wollte, auf die nächsthöhere Ebene schieben. Und manchmal wurde so eine Verantwortung geschoben und geschoben, und es dauerte eine Weile, ehe sie eine Ebene erreichte, von der aus sie wieder nach unten delegiert werden konnte. (GA, 16)

While so far I have carried out a joint analysis of *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, there is nevertheless a rather important difference between the two with regard to the degree of realism which they display. This contrast seems particularly significant because it shows that there was an evolution in Königsdorf's identity as a creative writer in the aftermath of unification.

Im Schatten des Regenbogens is more realistic than *Gleich neben Afrika* - a fact reflected in the reference to Königsdorf as a 'chronicler' in view of the former text's documentary quality. As Königsdorf herself said of her first post-unification novel, it swings 'zwischen Realität und Parodie der Realität'.⁵⁰ The many mysterious events turning the book into almost a thriller, and giving it an entertaining touch, are elements of its distinctive mixture of seriousness and sarcasm. Königsdorf's own remark: 'Nichts ist total ernst zu nehmen, und doch alles'⁵¹ indicates the duality of this book.

This decision to allow the novel to fluctuate between two poles is discussed in the novel itself through the main protagonist, a writer trying to come to terms with the recent changes. After much debating on how literature should develop within unified Germany, her first attempts at writing after unification are understandably marked by great tension, to the

⁵⁰ Introduction to *Gleich neben Afrika*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

point that she experiences a sort of writer's block.⁵² While she is forced to write in order to be able to pay the rent, thus illustrating the new existential problems which the market economy created for many former GDR writers, what really interests her is how life is going to develop in unified Germany: 'der Roman, um den es mir eigentlich ging, war das Leben (GA, 13).

Moreover, as she is determined to write a best-seller, an ironical reaction to the pressure placed on German writers after 1989 to produce a *Wenderoman* - that is the novel which would have best reflected the changed atmosphere of Germany -, she finds herself wondering about the expectations of her readership. She realises that if she were to write a novel on the subject matter of real interest to her, that would not necessarily go down well with the readership, and therefore reduce the chances of the novel becoming a best-seller. In the end, in order for her book to be successful, she understands that she should follow her companion's advice and write something light-weight for her readers, who, because of their many problems, 'wollten jetzt etwas Schönes lesen. Ein bißchen Liebe. Oder so' (GA, 96).

Hence, through the stratagem of introducing the main protagonist as a writer who is finding it hard to write, Königsdorf manages to talk about her own problems as a writer in post-1989 Germany. In this way, she cleverly overcomes her apprehensions by producing a novel about them. *Gleich neben Afrika* is in fact a compromise between her serious concerns and 'ein bißchen Liebe. Oder so', for it also deals with an homosexual relationship and at the same time it can be read as a thriller. The presence of the many themes serves too to underline the absurdity of the many demands placed on Eastern German writers after unification, who, even

⁵² As early as 1991 she had already expressed her reluctance to become 'ein deutscher Dichter' (DC, 80), for writers have never been much appreciated in Germany. Her fears of being attacked and strongly criticised materialise in the course of the German-German literature dispute, during which GDR culture and its representatives were demonised. This is therefore a further reason explaining why she found it difficult to write in the aftermath of unification.

before feeling at home within unified Germany, suddenly had to take into account the taste of the new readership and the changed needs of the old readers, and write with the awareness of being closely watched by the leading representatives of the former West German cultural media, who after 1989 had demonised GDR culture and attacked its intellectuals.

While Königsdorf's cleverness in conceiving *Gleich neben Afrika* as an ironical response to the pressure on Eastern German writers is without doubt one of its most remarkable features, perhaps the weakness of this work consists in the fact that the various themes it presents are not well inter-linked. For instance, the mysterious events come across as completely unrelated to the other plots. Thus, if we compare for example the use of the imaginary across Königsdorf's literary career, it emerges that in previous works she had often employed fantastic elements in order to reinforce her message. By contrast, here the thriller storyline has only an entertainment value. Therefore, if we consider for example Lise Meitner's apparition to the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* we see how this enables Königsdorf to draw a parallel between attitudes in the 1980s and in the years preceding the Second World War, and in this way show the limited progress made by society in terms of respect for human life. This is not the case in *Gleich neben Afrika* where the Swiss bank account, the corpse in the pond or the man following the protagonist in the car are very loosely linked to each other and to the other themes in this work. Instead of adding to the meaning of the book, they diminish the serious aspect of it. As Margarete Metzger has pointed out: 'Die Wende ins Ironisch-Parodistische nimmt den überzeugenden Gedanken und Reflexionen, die dieses Buch zweifellos enthält, einiges von ihrer Kraft'.⁵³

The decision to abandon this element of parody in her next work is certainly not arbitrary. If we see *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* as the

⁵³ Margarete, M., 'Flucht auf die Bananeninsel', *Straubinger Blatt*, 07.11.1992.

product of a transitory phase, then this orientation towards a literature marked by documentary characteristics should be viewed positively. In fact, it can be seen as the work in which Königsdorf has put aside the hesitations expressed in *Gleich neben Afrika* and says what she thinks should be said. The confidence to denounce problems such as the process of *Abwicklung* implies that she was starting to feel more at home within unified Germany and that she was recovering the courage 'sich einzumischen'.⁵⁴ The mere fact that she introduces the book with the following words: 'Alle Ähnlichkeiten sind zufällig. Zufällige Ähnlichkeiten sind beabsichtigt' is clearly indicative of Königsdorf's recovery of self-confidence.⁵⁵

5.3.1.3 Literature as a Means of Coming to Terms with the Past (Vergangenheitsbewältigung)

In addition to dealing with problems concerning the present day, she does not exclude the other two time dimensions of past and future. Similarly to *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*, in which the plot moves back and forth between past, present and future, in *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* Königsdorf refers to the past by pointing to some aspects of life in Nazi Germany, to a more recent past by talking about the GDR and to the present by focusing on the problems of unified Germany. This enables her to help the younger generation to confront the history of their country, a necessary step for them in order to be able to face the future. As a consequence, these works can also be read both as attempts at mourning (*Trauerarbeit*) and as Königsdorf's contribution to the battle against the so-called 'wall in the head'.

⁵⁴ This expression was used by Königsdorf in the text 'Deutschland, wo der Pfeffer wächst', part of DC, 49-52 (here 51). This text was first published as a newspaper article in *Die Zeit*, July 1990.

⁵⁵ This ironical opening statement reminds us of the one she used to introduce LD: 'Wer Ähnlichkeiten findet, muß Gründe haben'.

As exemplified by her two pre-1989 novels, Königsdorf has consistently shown a strong belief in the importance of mourning,⁵⁶ that phase in which one remembers and grieves for one's loss, re-assesses the situation and eventually starts afresh. In *Ungelegener Befund* she even demonstrates how the failure to undergo a process of mourning after the disappearance of the Third Reich was a reason why, despite the strong anti-fascist tradition promoted in the GDR, the fascist mentality never really disappeared. In certain instances, on the contrary, it was still supported, as revealed by the letters received by Dieter following his decision not to write a commemorative speech in his father's honour. Apart from old people trying to defend the memory of Dieter's father, often with the justification that it is now impossible to understand the real situation at the time of the Third Reich, among the authors of the letters there is also a young person. He/she does not seem to think that being a fascist is something one should be ashamed of, stresses his/her pride in being German, while playing down the racist aspect of fascism, and is convinced that '[e]s muß doch einen Grund gegeben haben, daß die Leute damals begeistert waren' (UB, 82).

The need to mourn, which had previously been seen as a problem of post-1945 society, suddenly became very relevant again during the years 1989-90. Especially Königsdorf's non-fictional writings reflect her conviction of the necessity to undergo a new phase of the process of coming to terms with the past in order to be able to start afresh, without repeating the mistakes made in the past. In an article, she writes:

Wenn wir die Vergangenheit kritisch und selbstkritisch verarbeiten, wenn wir traurig sind und schließlich uns und unser Leben annehmen, dann haben wir selbst die Chance, diesmal aus der Geschichte wirklich die Lehren zu ziehen. Und wir geben sie weiter. (DC, 25)

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the meaning of mourning, see Dinter, I., *Unvollendete Trauerarbeit in der DDR-Literatur* [see note 20 above].

With *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund* Königsdorf shows that she has learnt this important lesson after growing up with the taboo surrounding the Nazi past. In these two novels, she illustrates the fact that many supporters of fascism, after their political ideology fell to pieces, were simply eliminated from history, without having had the chance to redeem themselves. The picture of a GDR filled with resistance fighters did not leave them any space. Many fathers were condemned to silence and forced to accept another political doctrine. When Dieter says 'die Söhne der Söhne werden uns verfluchen' (UB, 97), it is clear that he realises that his generation, by failing to initiate a dialogue with their fathers, failed in their responsibility to deal properly with fascism and lost their chance to relegate it to history. In this way, they had not only betrayed their fathers by not letting them confront their experience, but also their children, by shifting to them the responsibility for coming to terms with the past: 'Indem wir uns der Verantwortung für die Geschichte entzogen, wir, die mittlere Generation, ließen wir die Väter im Stich und dann die Söhne' (UB, 92).⁵⁷

The inability to forgive shown by Königsdorf's generation is also a theme of *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, in which the figure of Frau Franz re-opens the discussion on the lack of opportunities for those who lived through the Second World War to recover their dignity. In this case, it is only at her funeral that Ruth comes to know the real story of the old lady who used to live in her flat. Frau Franz's daughter starts telling her how her mother had denounced a woman during the war, who, as a consequence, died in a camp. One night the husband of her victim made her confess her deed in front of her children. After her confession and plea for forgiveness, the son left forever; the daughter stayed, but their relationship was damaged beyond repair. Apart from losing her children, Frau Franz also had to pay in another way for her mistake: she was condemned to go through life with

⁵⁷ See also section 3.2.2.1 in which I discuss the theme of dignity in the context of *Ungelegener Befund*.

her big secret, without being able to talk to anybody about it as it would have suddenly changed the way in which people thought about her as much as it ruined her relationship with her children. Thus, while Frau Franz's daughter never managed to be open to her mother, she knows there was more to her than what she did during the war. This is why she asks Ruth to tell her something about her mother. At the same time, after Ruth is told Frau Franz's story, she finds it difficult to reconcile what she has just heard with her memories of the old lady (SR, 174). This clearly indicates that after the war many people had to go through a rupture as they were not allowed to deal with their past and therefore had to separate themselves from it.

In 1989-90, for the second time in less than fifty years, a generation of Germans found themselves on the wrong side, having to re-consider their position and deal with crimes committed in the name of a credo or out of conformity. Königsdorf, who belongs to the middle generation, could not but see the parallel between the two historical events and was determined not to let the younger generation be alienated from her generation. In her notable article 'Menschenwürde',⁵⁸ she urges the various age groups to keep communicating and working together. She draws attention to the fact that her generation abandoned their fathers not only after fascism, but after Stalinism too. She also apologises to the young people for having led them in the wrong direction and asks for their forgiveness.

Her request, especially to the young people, is more than just rhetorical, for she also provides them with the tools to understand the GDR and prevent her concern that: '[d]as einzige, was man aus der Geschichte lernen konnte, war, daß aus Geschichte nie etwas gelernt wurde' (GA, 88)⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See note 43 above.

⁵⁹ In *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* she makes a similar remark, when she says: 'Aus Erfahrung wurde wieder keine Erkenntnis' (SR, 23).

from becoming a reality.⁶⁰ As a consequence of the fact that her generation did not engage in an open dialogue with those who went through the war, their process of coming to terms with the past was limited to the ability of the individual to imagine what life was like in those years while living in a radically different political and social dimension. This had the disadvantage that most of the questions, for example those regarding the role that one's family might have played in this time, remained unanswered. Dieter Jhanz cannot be sure whether the author of the letters was really his father, and the first-person protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* will never know whether her father collaborated with the fascist regime.

Hence, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* can be seen as Königsdorf's effort to spare the younger generation the difficulties with the reconstruction of the past that her generation had. In fact, in both works she tries to depict at least some of the mechanisms and ways of thinking typical of life in the GDR, thus throwing some light on what happened during the forty years of the socialist regime. For instance, through the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* we can experience how she deals with her political identity, which are the reasons why she became a member of the Party and why this seemed to her the right way to create a more egalitarian and humane world. The same analysis is undertaken by Alice and the 'Alte', two of the people sharing the flat in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, for whom the Party fulfilled their need to belong.⁶¹

At the same time, the examination of the GDR past does not only serve the purpose of providing answers to the questions of the future generations. As Königsdorf states in an interview, as a reaction to the demonisation of the GDR, she concentrates on the GDR's past in order to

⁶⁰ She also insists on this concept in the interview with Gaus in which she states: 'Ich möchte, daß aus der Erfahrung, die wir gemacht haben, Erkenntnis wird, die die Aufgaben der Zukunft lösen hilft. Dazu will ich einen kleinen Beitrag leisten' [see note 56 of Chapter 1], 84.

⁶¹ For a more detailed discussion of the way in which the Party fulfilled the need to belong of these two characters, see also section 4.2.2.

offer a chance ‘an die, die nicht bei dieser Geschichte dabei waren, etwas vom Alltag hier zu verstehen’ and to remind them that ‘auch im Osten Deutschlands ein relativ normales Leben stattgefunden hat’.⁶² She does so by cleverly creating a link between her pre-1989 short stories and, for instance, *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, in which the setting and even the characters are the same. Thus, by presenting older figures, such as the ‘Alte’ or Dr. Kallenbach,⁶³ in their new situation as people who lost their job at the Institute of Mathematics following unification, she manages to convey a comprehensive idea of the impact of the events of 1989-90 on the daily life of individual East German citizens. In this manner, she offers an invaluable insight into history, which cannot be found in any history book. Her attempt to familiarise any non-Eastern German reader with daily life in the GDR can therefore be regarded as her contribution to dismantling the so-called ‘wall in the head’.

5.3.1.4 Literature as Aid to Living (*Lebenshilfe*)

While *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* counteract the demonisation of GDR culture by helping the non-Eastern German readership to understand how life functioned beyond the German-German border before unification, by portraying sympathetically various characters trying to come to terms with the events of 1989-90, what she intends to offer her Eastern German readership is aid to living. This means that the aim of her works is to assist her fellow citizens to cope with their problems. The very fact that both in *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des*

⁶² See Königsdorf’s interviews ‘Heimweh-Gefühle nach der DDR’ and ‘Irrationale Heimweh-Gefühle’, respectively published by *Passauer Neue Presse*, 13.01.1994 and *Freie Presse*, 07.01.1994.

⁶³ The figure of the ‘Alte’ was first introduced in the story ‘Autodidakten’. Even though I recognise that the ‘Alte’ is not a proper name and therefore it could easily refer to anybody, it is my contention that the ‘Alte’ in ‘Autodidakten’ and the one in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* could be the same person for they have the same educational background and profession, they belong to the same generation and they are not married. Dr. Kallenbach was first introduced in the story ‘Lemma I’. Eva Kaufmann draws a similar conclusion in her article ‘Adieu Cassandra?: Schriftstellerinnen aus der DDR vor, in und nach der Wende’ [see note 22 of the Introduction], 223.

Regenbogens she helps her readers in the process of mourning is part of this conception of literature as aid to living.

Next to assisting the readership in the process of mourning, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* provide help in the sense that they articulate those feelings and emotions felt by the Eastern Germans, who in that particular moment found it difficult to express themselves. Thus, these works give them the confidence to deal with their frustrations instead of suppressing them and the courage to utter their own opinions on their current situation by letting them know that they are not on their own. As early as 1990, she had expressed her intention to side with her fellow citizens, especially those who, like her, had experienced the collapse of the GDR with great pain: '[i]ch muß an der Seite derjenigen bleiben, die nun den gleichen schwierigen Weg gehen' (DC, 34).

The decision to offer aid to living through literature is a reaction to the fact that what Königsdorf observed around herself were citizens who, because of the shame they experienced after the GDR was declared morally and economically bankrupt, no longer dared to speak out. Their economic dependency on Western Germany and their desire to be unified, as expressed in the elections of 1990, put them in a position in which they quickly had to learn 'bescheiden zu werden und den Mund zu halten' (GA, 12). As a consequence of this almost enforced silence, they started perceiving their own feelings of fear, anger and frustration as 'unerlaubte Gefühle' (GA, 14). These 'forbidden feelings' were also a result of the fact that, in order to keep one's job, one had to make a credit-worthy impression, and therefore conceal any insecurity or negative feeling towards the new system, although Königsdorf points out that not even perfume helped to hide the smell of fear (GA, 14). Another category of 'forbidden feelings' were those of a nostalgic nature, feelings of homesickness towards the old system, values and ideas, feelings of

confusion created by having to function in a completely new system, in short any form of mourning. The irony of the post-unification period in this respect cannot go unnoticed: while the shift from a totalitarian to a democratic form of government should have given a voice to the people, it actually created new taboos: 'Auf jeden Fall war es ungehörig, von solchen Gefühlen [von Heimweh] zu sprechen. Man sprach möglichst überhaupt nicht über Gefühle. Noch besser war, wenn man gar keine hatte' (SR, 41).

In Königsdorf's view, there is also another aspect of the post-unification situation explaining why people no longer felt comfortable expressing their opinions. Given the proportions and the speed of the change, people almost felt unable to keep up with the events. As Königsdorf points out, Eastern Germans did not know much about the market economy before 1990; they expected it to bring a higher standard of life, and certainly not to sweep away many of the bases on which their sense of security rested: 'Das Wissen der Leute über den Kapitalismus stammte aus Fernsehserien. Ihnen fehlte jegliches Verständnis für die Sorgen eines Unternehmers (GA, 107). Hence, it was also because of the shock they experienced when faced with the reality of the market economy that they had the impression of having lost the appropriate language to utter their thoughts and feelings: 'Sie dachte, dass es viele Gründe geben konnte, warum einer über Käse sprach. Und manchmal sprach man über Käse, weil die Worte für das, was man eigentlich sagen wollte, fehlten' (SR, 69).

The fact that after unification she still conceived of literature as having to assist the readership committed her to the discussion of the most urgent problems in her society, which, not surprisingly, at that time concerned the process of coming to terms with the many changes which had just occurred. Therefore, if prior to 1989 the aspect of Königsdorf's works as having to offer aid to living contributed to their universal quality (as exemplified by the treatment in *Respektloser Umgang* of human problems

affecting people across the globe, such as the impact of illness on an individual's life, the threat of death and so on), this is not the case in these later works. By contrast, because of the commitment she felt towards her former compatriots, after 1989 the 'aid of living' aspect of these novels has the effect of restricting their impact to Eastern Germany.

5.3.2 New Elements in the Post-Unification Novels

5.3.2.1 Consolation instead of Provocation

Linked to the conception of literature as aid to living is an important feature of these works which distinguishes them from those written prior to unification. I am referring to Königsdorf's transformation of her relationship with her readers from being very provocative to adopting a consoling tone. Thus, in her pre-1989 works the readers are challenged, invited to draw their own conclusion and participate in the making of the story with their own critical thoughts. Königsdorf plays the role of the one posing the questions for which she only rarely and indirectly provides the answers. Hence, a lot remains unexplained and, because of her laconic style, it is the reader who has to fill in the gaps. In works such as *Meine ungehörigen Träume*, *Der Lauf der Dinge*, *Lichtverhältnisse* and *Ungelegener Befund* she encourages the reader to challenge conventional patterns of behaviour, false assumptions and, especially in the context of the science establishment, those mechanisms leading to stagnation and inefficiency.

Respektloser Umgang also belongs to this group of works. For instance, the ambiguity surrounding the 'Auftrag' (RU, 115), which Meitner assigns to the protagonist, but which remains mysterious throughout the novel, obliges her readers to attribute to it the meaning which best fits their life and their perception of the world. As Königsdorf explained: '[D]er Auftrag [ist] ein Sinnbild für etwas, worüber der Leser in unserer Zeit ganz neu nachdenken muß, worüber jeder eigentlich in seiner

konkreten Situation nachdenken muß [...].'⁶⁴ Consequently, the role which she ascribes to the reader is a very active one. She sees him as a 'partner', and considers it important 'daß er sich ernst genommen fühlt, daß nicht alles in einer einfachen Korrespondenz als Mitteilung gesagt wird, sondern daß er selber zum produktiven Gefühl angeregt wird'.⁶⁵

In her post-unification novels, on the contrary, she provides her readership with scenes and situations with which they can console themselves. By describing the thinking process, the doubts and inhibitions of her fictional figures, she is creating an atmosphere of solidarity in which she makes her readers aware that they share their situation with many others. Subsequently, while in her pre-1989 works the emphasis is on individual development, as discussed in the context of *Respektloser Umgang*, now she focuses on the community of Eastern Germans as a whole in order to give them a sense of belonging and counteract the feeling of exclusion from society brought about by the process of unification.⁶⁶ While this new approach does not contradict the ever-present goal of her writing activity, namely 'ermutigend zu sein',⁶⁷ there is however a fundamental difference in the manner in which she now encourages her readers. If before 1989 she inspires them to improve the quality of their life by asking them to be critical of the system, in these works she is encouraging them to try and survive in a society which is not theirs.

As Eva Kaufmann has pointed out,⁶⁸ after 1989 Königsdorf quite obviously did not need to unsettle her readership, as the recent events in their country had already done so in full measure. While this is certainly

⁶⁴ Interview with Roy, M-A., 17.06.1987, *Connaissance de la RDA*, Vol. 25, 1987, 21-26 (here 25).

⁶⁵ 'Gerade der Traum ermöglicht beim Schreiben die Lösung aus einem strengen Konzept', interview with Quinke, R., *Deutsche Volkszeitung/die Tat*, 08.06.1984.

⁶⁶ In this context, she remarks: 'Schon bei dem Wort Gesellschaft fing es an. Keiner von uns würde doch auf den Gedanken kommen, daß dieses Wort ganz anders gebraucht wurde und daß es nun etwas Ausschließendes hatte. Daß man nicht mehr zur Gesellschaft gehörte' (GA, 19).

⁶⁷ Welke D., 'Zum Beispiel an die Börse gehen', *Wochenpost*, 27.05.1992.

⁶⁸ Kaufmann, E., 'Laudatio für Helga Königsdorf [see note 31 of the Introduction], 405-408.

true, it is also worth noting that the new function which she started ascribing to literature in this period is almost diametrically opposed to the concepts on which her previous works were based. For instance, if prior to unification, she solicits her readers to assume a critical attitude vis-à-vis traditions and rituals, now she re-evaluates their importance as elements generating a sense of belonging and therefore to be viewed positively. As a result, while in her pre-1989 writings she tries to stimulate the creativity of her readers in order to enable them to 'invent' their own lifestyle, now she tries to offer them a means of identification, to give them back a sense of familiarity, or to use Königsdorf's own words: 'das Vertraute'.⁶⁹ This is the manner in which, according to her, in this difficult moment, she can help her readership to pluck up their courage:

Literatur kann den 'kleinen' Menschen wieder in sein Recht einsetzen. Kann auf seiner Seite sein, wenn er irrt, fehlt und sich fürchtet. Denn nur der Mensch, der sich selbst annehmen kann, hat den Mut, die Welt anzunehmen, kann sich der Welt annehmen. (RW, 47)

5.3.2.2 Hopelessness and Resignation

One of the negative side-effects of the lack of ambition towards a better life is that it generates a sense of hopelessness and resignation vis-à-vis the present and the future.⁷⁰ As mentioned above, Königsdorf's new approach to literature aims at offering solidarity to her readers, but does not stimulate them to face new challenges. This could be perceived as a direct consequence of the fact that Königsdorf herself has lost faith in the future. Although the first signs of resignation can be traced back to *Lichtverhältnisse*,⁷¹ the sense of resignation emerging from these later works is more profound. While in the short stories Königsdorf is almost completely disillusioned about the possibility of changing the system, since this forged repressed individuals who did not have the strength to continue

⁶⁹ See the text 'Mut zu stolzen Tönen' in RW, 43-47.

⁷⁰ As shown in sections 2.3.1 and 3.4.2, in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* Königsdorf stops being resigned and puts forwards a lot of ideas and suggestions in order 'to save the world'.

⁷¹ See for example the discussion of the story 'Reise im Winter' in section 1.5.

the struggle for the realisation of the socialist utopia (LV, 155), in these novels she has to come to terms with the fact that her utopian hopes were shattered by the political events of 1989-90. Even though she was aware of the gap between the GDR's reality and the socialist utopia, such a vision remained nevertheless the ultimate goal of her writings and served as a guide for the direction in which she believed society should have developed. After this vision was swept away, Königsdorf no longer seemed to have a clear idea towards which goal she should have channelled her energy and hopes.⁷² Hence, she was left with no other choice but to resign herself to the idea that the battle for the realisation of utopia was over, an experience which she described as 'ein Schmerz wie nach einer Operation' (DC, 34).

This post-unification sense of desolation becomes immediately evident if, for instance, we compare *Gleich neben Afrika* with *Respektloser Umgang*. These works contain autobiographical elements: they both deal with Königsdorf's family background and how this has influenced her personal development. However, while the protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang*, at the end of a painful process of self-analysis, finds a way to carry on living with dignity, the identity search of the main character of *Gleich neben Afrika* is far less successful. While trying to flee the world in search of a new 'home', she ends up on a remote island 'just next to Africa'. At the end of her struggle to find a place where she feels she belongs, she is so indifferent to everything and everybody that she lets her partner be bitten by a black widow spider and accepts the banana plantation on the island as her home - 'Zuhause': 'Und eigentlich ist dieser grüne Schatten zwischen den Bananenstauden für einen, der nichts mehr als "sein Zuhause" bezeichnen kann, nicht der schlechteste Aufenthaltsort' (GA, 10).

⁷² In section of 2.3.1.1 I pointed out that in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* it emerges that the creation of an environmentally friendly society is Königsdorf's new goal towards which she believes society's energy should be re-channelled.

The same lack of alternative perspectives can be observed in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*. Alice, who refuses to appear in front of the ‘Integritätskommission’⁷³ in the attempt to save her dignity, cannot win against the system. Thus, instead of carrying on her fight, she prefers to opt out and becomes a tramp. This is how Königsdorf describes Alice’s resignation: ‘Der Alice erschien es, als habe sie alles schon einmal gesehen. Aber zugleich war es, als sähe sie alles auf neue Art. Die Welt war die Welt. Und es wäre nur dumm gewesen, der Welt übelzunehmen, daß sie war, wie sie war’ (SR, 162). At the same time, Ruth cannot but resign herself to the fact that she cannot continue living her decent life, once she is made redundant and no longer able to pay the rent.

The case of the ‘Alte’ is particularly interesting because he apparently manages to integrate himself into society, but in reality is one of the best examples showing the difficulty of maintaining one’s integrity in the process of adaptation to the new system. The fact that he is ready to give up being his own person starts emerging in the context of the relationship to his brother, who grew up in West Germany. For instance, the ‘Alte’ accepts that he cannot always express his opinions, if he wants to maintain contact with him. While they can communicate and be supportive on a business level, they cannot talk openly. The *Abwicklung*, for instance, is a taboo topic, and it is only the fact that the ‘Alte’ accepts this, which enables them to spend New Year’s Eve together (SR, 154). This difficulty of communicating becomes especially evident when the ‘Alte’ consults his brother on the steps to take after his dismissal. While he agrees to follow his brother’s advice not to undertake any action against it, it is only when he talks to Ruth that his real feelings emerge. In fact, as he reports to her his conversation with the brother, he says: ‘Ins Gesicht spucken müßte ich mir’ (SR, 166) for having so quickly turned his back on his past.

⁷³ As explained in section 2.3.2, the ‘Integritätskommission’ was the committee in charge of judging the employees who were morally suitable to continue working at the Institute of Mathematics.

However, the 'Alte' is so determined to integrate himself into the system that he is ready to accept any sort of compromise. For instance, in order to turn his ambition into reality not only does he have to give up his old identity, but he also has to make himself invisible. Thus, although he is the one with the brilliant idea of establishing a group of industrial researchers, he is willing to remain in the background 'damit nicht der geringste Verdacht aufkäme' (SR, 167) that somebody with his past was behind it. In the attempt to avoid facing the loss of dignity involved in his project, '[e]r sagte von sich, er habe wieder Tritt gefaßt' (SR, 167).

In addition to putting his past aside, he is also ready to dismiss his old friends. Therefore, the process of unification is not only seen as humiliating for the individual Eastern German citizens, but also as upsetting their relationships with one another. Regarding Ruth, for instance, the 'Alte' relies on her when he needs to open his heart because he knows that, unlike his brother, she can understand him. Nevertheless, although she used to be his secretary for years and gave him accommodation when he needed it, he does not offer her work because '[e]r brauchte eine Sekretärin, die funktionierte. Keine, die unkonstruktiv kritisierte' (SR, 168). Unfortunately, in order to be active in the new society, he cannot continue being somebody who wants to 'save the world' (SR, 167), but has to turn into an ambitious, career-orientated man.

By contrast, Alice, who remains faithful to her ideals and her identity, has no choice but to drop out.⁷⁴ It is for the readership to draw their own conclusion about whether it is better to live at the margins of society and preserve one's dignity, or to become part of it and deny one's own past life. In Königsdorf's gloomy picture of the situation, there seem to be no other alternatives, with the result that whichever path her fictional

⁷⁴ 'Und sie dachte weiter, daß alles, was sie erlebt hatte, ihr gehörte. Gut oder schlecht war nicht die Frage' (SR, 160).

figures take, they are always going to be 'losers'. The rainbow, an obvious symbol of hope, does appear in the January sky over Eastern Berlin, but her characters seem to be still standing in the shadow that it throws.

5.3.2.3 Stereotypes and Prejudices

The 'Alte' in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* makes the decision that 'Es ist Zeit, die Vorurteile durch Urteile zu ersetzen' and that for this to happen 'die anderen [müssen] Gesichter bekommen' (SR, 82). However, the fact that this change of attitude is a difficult task becomes clear in Königsdorf's post-unification novels, in which she finds it problematic to break away from the old prejudices and common places typical of the GDR perspective on the West. Along the lines of the new consolatory function of literature, the surfacing of stereotypes and prejudices is an unfortunate consequence of her attempt at creating a sense of familiarity in her works for her Eastern German readership.

The fact that the 'Gesichter der anderen' remain exactly the same as those of the GDR era is for instance demonstrated by the way in which she characterises the new society, which appears as a mixture of pornography, deceit, and immorality. To these images she contrasts the portraits of naïveté and innocence with which she describes her Eastern German characters. Thus, in *Gleich neben Afrika*, the 'Wessis' are presented as travelling through Thuringia looking for antique furniture, which they buy at bargain prices, exploiting in this way the Eastern Germans' inexperience. Moreover, in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, it is again a 'Wessi' allegedly paying less than the market value for the old Frau Franz's valuables.

The problem encountered by Königsdorf in moving away from old stereotypes becomes particularly evident in the description of the brothers, the 'Alte' and the 'Westalte' who were separated as babies and grew up in the two Germanies. The first time they met was after unification, when

they found themselves face to face as 'Abgewickelte' and 'Abwickler' - the 'Alte' is about to be laid off by his brother. Although they physically look alike - they also have the same talents as they are both scientists -, the image they project is very different and reflects some of the stereotypes attached to the environments in which they were brought up. As people in the Institute of Mathematics did not know that the 'Alte' had a brother, the first time they saw the 'Westalte', they thought it was their old colleague with a new look and could not believe their eyes:

Erst entstieg er einem metallgrauen Mercedes, ging schwungvoll durch die Flügeltüren und verschmähte wie früher den Fahrstuhl. Es war ganz unzweifelhaft der Alte. Nur sein Outfit hatte sich verändert. Statt Rundstrickhosen, vom häufigen Waschen kurz geworden, trug er jetzt Maßanzug. Das sah man auf den ersten Blick. Aber nicht nur die Kleidung war anders. Auch seine Bewegungen wirkten irgendwie selbstsicherer, ja, man konnte sagen, kultivierter. (SR, 65)

Apart from the stereotyped way in which they are described, the introduction of the brothers deserves further attention because it is used to illustrate one of the problems which characterised the relationship between the two Germanies after unification: the perceived arrogant attitude of the Western Germans towards the Eastern Germans. With the case of the two brothers Königsdorf is implying that it was simply chance that one was brought up in the West and the other in the East. The car of the aunt, in which the 'Ostalte' was supposed to flee towards West, broke down ten kilometres from the border, and for this reason the brothers grew up separately (SR, 32). The interchangeability of these two characters is stressed by the fact that when they meet the Eastern German brother starts by citing the bible, while the other retaliates with a quote from Stalin (SR, 74). In this light, what seems absurd is that one is now sitting in judgement over the other. If we take the brothers as representative of the relationship between East and West, it is then clear that Königsdorf is drawing attention to the absurdity of Western Germany's claim to superiority over Eastern Germany. As in the case of the brothers, also in the context of the two Germanies, one should bear in mind that: 'Der andere war der

unwiderlegbare Beweis, daß ihm das auch hätte passieren können (SR, 73).⁷⁵

Königsdorf's GDR perspective emerges also from the fact that, in order to emphasise further the absurdity of Western Germany's role of judge in the process of unification, she points to aspects of capitalism which are not so dissimilar from those of socialism. Creative potential, which in the GDR was wasted in the attempt of those at the top to preserve their power, is now invested in 'verlogenes Marketing' (SR, 157), the amount of bureaucracy seems to be just the same and the methods used in the process of *Abwicklung* are comparable to those of Lenin and Stalin: 'Das alte Machtgefüge mußte zerschlagen werden, selbst da, wo es punktuell etwas zum Blühen gebracht hatte. Das hätten die Leute schon bei ihrem Lenin nachlesen können' (SR, 59).

Apart from the presence of stereotypes and GDR commonplaces about the West, the expressions used by Königsdorf, if interpreted as cultural markers, are another problematic area, as instead of blurring the differences, they contribute to strengthening them. The constant distinction between 'we' and 'they', the use of formulations such as 'bei uns' have the effect of reinforcing the already existing image of Western Germans as 'others'. In particular, the fact that she often refers to Western Germans as 'die Neuen' reflects Königsdorf's view of Eastern Germany as a country which has just been conquered by new rulers, thus supporting the

⁷⁵ In his novel *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, Christoph Hein too introduces two brothers who grew up in the two Germanies. The one in the West becomes an unscrupulous gambler, who, after rejecting all moral principles, even decides to kill a man, an action which he views as the most challenging of his games. Thanks to his immorality, he becomes a rich and successful lawyer, while his step-brother ends up losing his job and being discriminated against for protesting against the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. However, as opposed to Königsdorf's figures, Hein does not introduce the two brothers to draw attention to issues of moral superiority between East and West. On the contrary, he prevents the East German brother from becoming the moral counterpart of the other by introducing him only as a marginal character. See Hein, C., *Das Napoleon-Spiel* (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, 1993).

widespread opinion in the new federal states that unification has meant the colonisation of the East by the West.

In this manner, Königsdorf ends up fostering the Eastern Germans' sense of alienation vis-à-vis the society they are now part of, which was an equally strong feature of the relationship between people and state under the SED regime. This encouraged many former GDR citizens to lead a 'double life' consisting of two identities, namely a public one as obedient citizens of the state, and a more truthful private one, which was the expression of their real self. These two identities were negatively connected only by the fact that the barriers erected around their private life were a reaction to the frustrations provoked by the way in which they had to behave in public. This is, for example, how Timothy Garton Ash describes the GDR society of the 1980s:

Der Riß zwischen dem öffentlichen und privaten Ich, der offiziellen und der inoffiziellen Sprache, kurz - das Doppelleben [...]. Die Bereitschaft zum Doppelleben impliziert auch die Akzeptierung einer Doppelmoral: Ich bin bereit, einem staatlichen Verhalten zu applaudieren, dem Ich im privaten Bereich niemals Anerkennung zollen würde.⁷⁶

This apathetic behaviour of the GDR's citizens, the outer conformity arising from the lack of courage to be oneself was severely criticised in all of Königsdorf's pre-1989 works. By contrast, in these two novels she almost seems to see the adoption of a double life as the only viable solution to lessen the Eastern Germans' frustrations with their new situation. While she shows that it is a question of survival for them to adapt to the new system in order to find or keep employment, with her novels she is offering them a separate identity in their private sphere on which they can fall back. Hence, this identity becomes the space where they can find understanding and sympathy, feel free to voice their doubts and be immediately

⁷⁶ Garton Ash, T., *'Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein...' Die DDR heute* (Hamburg: Spiegel, 1981), 75-76.

understood on the basis of a common cultural heritage, shared memories and experiences.

In addition to fulfilling the Eastern Germans' need for belonging, this separate identity also allows them to see the Western Germans as the outsiders, thus helping them to cope with their humiliations. As this identity is supposed to exist beyond society, since society is formed by 'them, the Western Germans, the Wessis', while 'we, the Osis' are the ones who are excluded, by stressing the uniqueness of the Eastern German experience, she can redress the balance thus creating the impression that those excluded, who cannot understand this world because they have not lived it, are for once the Western Germans.

Although it is indisputable that the promotion of such an identity hinders the national process of coming together, this does not necessarily mean that Königsdorf's works have always implied this mutual incompatibility. As the title *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen* indicates, Königsdorf recognised very early on that '[d]ie Situation könnte eine Chance sein: vielleicht ein neuer Anfang' (DC, 85). However, by the time she wrote these novels, the elimination of the Eastern Germans from the idea of 'Tüchtigkeit' (DC, 97),⁷⁷ which according to her could have been an unifying element, the fact that the process of unification left her fellow citizens humiliated and without perspectives for the future (DC, 85) had made her increasingly disillusioned about Germany's ability to grasp its historic opportunity.

Her own definition of identity: 'Die Identität eines Menschen ist ein inneres und ein äußeres Bild im Wechsel, ein Kompromiß zwischen Rollenangebot und eigener Regie. Es ist die Identität innerhalb einer Gemeinschaft' (DC, 84), offers a further explanation to her growing

⁷⁷ I also referred to this point in section 3.4.1.1.

disillusionment and reliance on the Eastern German identity. Since the roles which the Eastern Germans could take on in unified Germany were mainly humiliating, it should not surprise us if Königsdorf, in the attempt to protect her former fellow citizens' dignity, did not try to foster a sense of belonging to post-1990 Germany, but offered instead the comforts of the old identity.

In the light of all the points discussed hitherto, if we adopt Thomas Ahbe's definition of *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the former GDR), we can easily see how *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* can be classified as examples of this post-unification phenomenon. According to Ahbe:

Man kann 'Ostalgie' als Versuch betrachten, sich Anerkennung, die ein menschliches Grundbedürfnis ist, im Bezug auf eine gemeinsame Vergangenheit (und Gegenwart) zu verschaffen, und darin aus psychosozialer Perspektive 'ein Stück Normalisierung, eine produktive Selbstermächtigung' annoncieren, in dem man sich als Partner rekonstruiert, um nicht nur Objekt der Resozialisierung zu sein.⁷⁸

In this respect, especially knowing the indignation expressed by Königsdorf at the failure to take human dignity into account in the process of unification, it is understandable that she should try to re-establish her value as a person and as a writer. However, one has the impression that she did not take into account the risks of contributing in this way to the creation of a 'counter identity'⁷⁹ or of leaving the Eastern Germans in an in-between position between the past and the present, thus reinforcing the so-called 'wall in the head' instead of fighting against it, as it was her original intention. In such a delicate historical moment Königsdorf should have perhaps prevented her nostalgic feelings from influencing her writings. It seems that she let her need to belong and her sadness for having lost her

⁷⁸ See Thomas Ahbe, 'Ostalgie als Selbstermächtigung', *Deutschland Archiv: Zeitschrift für das vereinigte Deutschland*, 4, 1997, 614-619 cited by Turk, H. et al. (eds), *Kulturelle Grenzziehungen im Spiegel der Literaturen: Nationalismus, Regionalismus, Fundamentalismus* (Göttingen: Wellstein, 1998), 42.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

identity as a GDR citizen prevail in her works without considering the wider impact that the preservation of a separate Eastern German identity might have had in the long run.

5.3.2.4 'Ich bin ratlos wie die Leser. Aber ich kann diese Ratlosigkeit formulieren',⁸⁰

The difficulty of separating her feelings as a former GDR citizen from her identity as a writer is probably linked to Königsdorf's inability to detach her emotions from her rational thoughts: 'Ich [...] war von der rationalen Durchdringung bereits viel weiter und glaubte, vieles zu verstehen. Doch das Gefühl kam irgendwo nicht hinterher. Man hatte irrationale Empfindungen, die mit dem Verstand nicht mehr zusammenpaßten'.⁸¹ Hence, Königsdorf's nostalgia can be understood in the light of the predominance of her irrational feelings, leading to a state of disorientation vis-à-vis the post-unification situation. While she has always admitted to this, what is interesting to note is that she did not see her confusion as a reason to stop writing. On the contrary, it is precisely through her writings that she tried to come to terms with it. As she explained: 'Im Unterschied zu anderen mit moralisch-edlen Antrieben ist bei mir Peinlichkeit ein wesentliches Schreibmotiv. Ich schreibe, um das, was mir passiert, zu bewältigen'.⁸² In the following section, I will investigate the effects that, according to my analysis, her disorientation has on the two post-1989 novels, including the lack of sovereignty and the difficulty she experiences in creating credible characters.

Given the evolution of the political situation and the social transformations that took place after 1989, it is not surprising that in *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* Königsdorf is still working at understanding the past and familiarising herself with the functioning of

⁸⁰ See Königsdorf's interview 'Irrationale Heimweh-Gefühle' [see note 62 above].

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Welke, D., 'Zum Beispiel an die Börse gehen', *Wochenpost*, 27.05.1992.

her new society. However, from certain angles, this results in a lack of sovereignty with regard to the subject matter distinguishing these first post-unification novels from the pre-1989 works. Whereas prior to 1989 she could make the 'heutiges Weltbewußtsein mitteilbar' (MS, 9) by engaging in a provocative dialogue with the readership, in these two novels she is still trying to define the meaning of 'Weltbewußtsein' within unified Germany. After all, it is important to remember that *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* appeared only a relatively short time after unification, which might not have been enough for Königsdorf to put some distance between herself and the historical events of 1989-90. As Daniela Dahn pointed out: 'Künstlerische Verarbeitung erfordert innere Distanz und spielerische Souveränität gegenüber dem Gegenstand, braucht also Zeit, oft viele Jahre'.⁸³

On the one hand, this new approach to writing shows Königsdorf's unwillingness to be seen as a moral leader or to be put on a pedestal,⁸⁴ as was the case in the GDR where often writers were regarded as moral authorities. On the contrary, in 1989 she welcomed this change which enabled her to turn literature into a research field not just for the reader, but for the author as well. As she commented in this respect: 'Ich bin ratlos wie die Leser. Aber ich kann diese Ratlosigkeit formulieren'.⁸⁵ Subsequently, in the post-unification novels, her relationship to the readers becomes almost more honest, because they are now on the same level. While in her works before the 'peaceful Revolution' she presents her readers with problematic issues on which she had already reflected, in the post-unification novels she addresses problems which are as new to her as to anybody else. This is also why she has to abandon her provocative attitude.

⁸³ Dahn, D., 'Die ostdeutschen Schriftsteller nach der Vereinigung: Veränderte Schreibbedingungen, Erwartungen, Themen', in Beitter, U. E. (ed.), *Schreiben im heutigen Deutschland: Die Literaturszene nach der Wende* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 49.

⁸⁴ In an interview she in fact stated: 'Ich schreibe, um ins Gespräch zu kommen, nicht um aufs Podest gehoben zu werden', Berkholz, S., 'Die Last dieser Zeit', *Tagesspiegel*, 13.10.1993.

⁸⁵ See Königsdorf's interview 'Irrationale Heimweh-Gefühle'.

On the other hand, however, in the hope that by putting her doubts, thoughts and insecurities into her characters' mouth this will help her to come to terms with her own disorientation, the experimental treatment of her figures prevents them from developing into rounded individuals. Especially with regard to *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, many reviewers have criticised the fact that the figures are not plastic enough, and that they remain lifeless throughout the novel, all factors endangering their credibility.

Perhaps the best example to illustrate how Königsdorf has not succeeded in building credible characters is the figure of Alice, as she even contradicts herself in describing her personality. At first, Alice is introduced as somebody who does not trust herself, which impedes her from having constructive relationships with other people: 'Sie mißtraute ihrem Gefühl. [...] Das Mißtrauen dem eigenen Gefühl gegenüber machte sie konfliktunfähig' (SR, 64). Then, some pages later, Alice is presented as 'ein offener Mensch'⁸⁶ who 'hatte sich immer den Luxus spontaner Reaktionen geleistet und selten über ihre Wirkung auf andere nachgedacht' (SR, 108). Furthermore, she is also presented as having the reputation of being arrogant because of her unwillingness to conform (SR, 21), which, if it makes sense in the context of the life of a spontaneous person, does not fit with the personality of somebody who '[e]in halbes Leben lang hatte [...] die lächerlichsten Rituale befolgt und war zu pragmatischem Verhalten bereit gewesen' (SR, 62). These kinds of incoherence are, for instance, part of the reason why the journalist Nolte comments with regard to Königsdorf's characters: 'Die Figuren in diesem Roman sind keine Menschen, sondern Vorwände für die Autorin, um ihre Gedanken über den Verlauf der deutschen Einheit loszuwerden'.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Königsdorf repeats that Alice was an open person on page 147. This is a further proof that she fails to develop her characters, otherwise she would not have the need towards the end of the book to explain again something basic about Alice, which the readers by now should have understood on their own.

⁸⁷ Nolte, D., 'Ein hartes Schicksal für Zahlographen', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 05.10.1993.

In my view, the fact that Königsdorf fails to turn her fictional characters into convincing and believable figures is the consequence of various factors. First of all, with regard to *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, it is important to mention Königsdorf's inexperience in dealing with so many characters at a time. Up until this point all her short stories had only one protagonist, while her two previous novels, *Respektloser Umgang* and *Gleich neben Afrika*, had two.

Linked to this wider perspective is the fact that in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* she introduces a third-person narrator for the first time. This choice is probably a consequence of the fact that this work is the least autobiographically based of Königsdorf's novels - with the exception of *Ungelegener Befund*, in which case however, as it is an epistolary novel, the letters are obviously written in the first person. Although many reviewers have tended to see Alice as an autobiographical figure, I agree with this reading only in part. Alice only shares with Königsdorf the fact that they are both scientists, members of the Party and living in Berlin. Even Alice's experience with the process of *Abwicklung* is something which Königsdorf observed and analysed from the outside⁸⁸ as she left her job at the Academy of Sciences as early as 1990. By contrast, the female protagonists of *Respektloser Umgang* and *Gleich neben Afrika*, who for this reason come across as being quite similar, have much more in common with Königsdorf than their profession, as they also share her past and her family background. Since the latter are more credible than Alice, this seems therefore to depend

⁸⁸ In order to study the effects of *Abwicklung*, Königsdorf collected the documents regarding the dismissal of a professor of English at a university in the former GDR. He was fired after having been asked to appear in front of a commission called 'Personalkommission', which had the task 'Menschen in ihrer konkreten Umfeldbezogenheit zu bewerten'. In an attempt to save his job, he wrote many different letters to various authorities, even to the President of Germany. These documents report on the existence of a *Wissenschaftler-Integrations-Programm* (WIP) - a programme to reintegrate scientists into working life. In order to be admitted to this program, people had to appear in front of an *Integritätskommission*, which is the term also used by Königsdorf in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* to describe the commission in charge of judging Alice's situation. The documents regarding *Abwicklung* can be found in the *Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste*, Berlin, Helga Königsdorf Archiv, 30.

on the fact that they are largely based on Königsdorf's own personal experience.

Although one could argue that the fact that both *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* have been left open-ended might be a further consequence of Königsdorf's disorientation, I tend to see this element as part of her narrative strategy. *Respektloser Umgang*, for example, ends with ambiguity as we are never told what the 'Auftrag' (RU, 115) consists of. *Ungelegener Befund* does not provide any final elucidation of the real identity of the author of the letters. In the case of both these novels, it does not seem important to have certainties at the end, since Königsdorf's aim is to be thought-provoking, and she is not simply telling a story. At the same time, the open ending of *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* does not appear to compromise the sense of the novels as a whole, on the contrary it emphasises it. As they are both meant to offer a portrait of daily life, the open end helps to create a sense of uncertainty between when the novels break off and what will come next, thus reflecting the unpredictability of life in the new federal states in this period of rapid transition.

5.4 Königsdorf's Re-definition of Her Identity as a Creative Writer in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*

The fact that some of the characteristics of the first two post-unification novels, such as the adoption of a consoling tone or the concept of literature as the space in which to articulate one's confusion, are linked to the peculiarity of the historical moment in which they were written, is evident when we move on to *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, since they do not feature here. As in the aftermath of unification Königsdorf found herself in what Peter Peters defines as a "postmoderne Konstellation" of overlapping

and heterogeneous discourses within the field of literary discourse',⁸⁹ her difficulty in defining her own literary profile should not come as a surprise. It is also in the light of this disorientation that it becomes understandable why in her first works after 1989 she might have kept alive a continuity with some of the GDR's literary tendencies by attributing tasks to literature which made sense in the context of the cultural landscape of the SED regime, but not necessarily in that of unified Germany.

Hence, my argument with regard to *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* is that after the hesitations of the first post-unification years, Königsdorf has re-defined her literary profile. This does not mean that she wiped out her past identity as a creative writer and replaced it with a new one. On the contrary, as I will show in the following section, in this novel she re-introduces many of the elements present in her pre-1989 works. Königsdorf's re-definition of identity is therefore not so much based on the rejection of her old positions, rather the result of a new self-confidence, which enables her to be selective. Thanks to the fact that she had more time to familiarise herself with the new society, to assess her past experience and put some distance between herself and the collapse of the GDR, in this work she is able to choose those elements of her past identity as a creative writer which in her view are worth keeping and developing further, and to combine them with her new awareness of her role in unified Germany.⁹⁰ As a result, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* appears as an ensemble of pre- and post-unification elements and others, such as the theme of love, which

⁸⁹ Peters, P., ' "We are one book": Perspectives and Developments of an All-German Literature' [see note 10 above], 304.

⁹⁰ As I discussed in the preceding chapters, other literary works before these novels, such as *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* and *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, show that Königsdorf is increasingly more at ease within unified Germany. For instance in Chapters 2 and 3 I pointed out that the new ideas put forward by Königsdorf in order to improve society in the essays contained in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* are a clear sign that she wants to be involved within the intellectual scene and contribute to the intellectual discourse. In Chapter 4, I focused on the fact that in this work she seems to have reached a certain balance in her relationship to Germany. Furthermore in Chapter 3, I discussed *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* as a work paving the way to *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* since here Königsdorf's decision to interview both Eastern and Western German citizens attest, in my view, to the fact that she stops making the distinction between East and West.

have been present throughout Königsdorf's literary career. Given the variety of all the elements forming *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, in this work Königsdorf seems to have finally gained that independence, which she had anticipated in the aftermath of the 'peaceful Revolution', but which is not yet evident in her first post-1989 writings.

5.4.1 Thematic Continuity between the Pre- and Post-Unification Works: the Exploration of the Theme of Love

An interesting aspect characterising Königsdorf's literary production as a whole is the thematic continuity linking the pre- to the post-unification works, including *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, even if, as I pointed out above, these two novels reflect the transitional character of the period in which they were written and therefore, from many points of view, stand apart. Love is the theme which connects all of Königsdorf's works, thus demonstrating a high level of consistency within her identity, which even resisted the earthquake of the years 1989-90. Because of the various aspects of love which Königsdorf examines, it is my contention that *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* can be seen as another chapter in a large discussion which she started with her first short stories. Such a discussion is carried out through the exploration of different kinds of love, individually analysed in the various fictional works. For instance, in the short stories the focus is mainly on heterosexual relationships, in *Ungelegener Befund* and *Gleich neben Afrika* on homosexual love, in *Respektloser Umgang* on love of oneself in the sense of self-respect, and finally in *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* she investigates the 'Liebe zur Sache', with which she means the feeling drawing her protagonists towards the Party.⁹¹

⁹¹ This is how Königsdorf describes this type of love in the context of when Alice became a member of the Party: 'Sie spürte, daß es noch eine höhere Liebe gab als die Liebe zwischen Frau und Mann. Die Liebe zur Sache', (SR, 86). See also section 4.2.2.

This last kind of love, which represents the fulfilment of one's need to belong, is the reason put forward by Königsdorf to explain the compromises accepted by the former GDR intellectuals, which led them to support an undemocratic regime. This type of love is similar to the one presented in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, as here as well love is the motive behind every action, even the criminal ones. Everything happens because of love, or rather because of the need to be loved. Hence, as the novel focuses on such a need in the context of a family and of a woman who only loves her cats, the introduction of these two further types of love contributes to the above mentioned completion of that much wider discussion which runs through all of Königsdorf's works.

In this novel, the theme of love plays a particular role as the main link between the narration concerning the Schraders and the 'Katzenfütterin'. However, while in the first case we are confronted with a very conventional kind of love, in the second instance we are faced with an individual who, after feeling rejected by society, finds love in the cats which she looks after. The first noteworthy difference between these two types of love is that the first one is based on selfishness, on the concept of exclusion, and generates feelings of guilt and mistrust, while the second one appears to be much purer, unconditional and encouraging: 'Wen die Katzen lieben, den lieben sie bedingungslos. Sie fragen nicht nach Jugend, Schönheit oder Ansehn. Sie lieben ihn, wie er ist, und geben ihm damit ein besseres Gefühl für sich selbst' (EG, 97).

The first type of love is presented through the Schrader family, which is introduced whilst celebrating Christmas. At this special time of the year, conventionally regarded as a family occasion, the Schraders do not display any joy at being together. The atmosphere in the house is very tense, as they all try to hide their dissatisfaction by keeping up the appearance of the normal family enjoying Christmas. The father is the one

who, in particular, makes an effort to do everything according to tradition. His attempts are clumsy and instead of making things easier, he ends up upsetting his wife, showing in this way his lack of sensitivity and inability to support his partner. The difficulty in communicating is another of the features to be observed right at the onset of the novel. The four members of the family seem to have given up long ago trying to communicate their true, deep feelings to each other. Despite living under the same roof, they all seem very isolated.

The shadow hanging over the Schraders and complicating the relationship between the four of them is the 'mysterious' disappearance of the grandmother, who vanished in the previous autumn. First the illness and subsequently the disappearance of the grandmother are presented as indicative of the lack of real love and support within the family. As the other family members were unable to cope with the difficult situation generating a very tense atmosphere within the household, Frau Schrader was left alone to look after her mother even though she was in need of constant care. As a consequence of Herr Schrader's inability to analyse situations and assume responsibility, as shown by his philosophy of life: 'Augen zu und durch' (EG, 43), the only solution he comes up with to alleviate his wife's burden is to abandon the grandmother to her fate. In this manner, he hopes to normalise the situation within the family and to repair the damage which the rest of the family have suffered in their relationships with each other.

The fact that he abandons the grandmother can be viewed as the desperate act of a man lacking the courage⁹² to cope with difficulties and to look for acceptable alternative solutions. Throughout the book he is described as somebody accustomed to compromising himself, and who has

⁹² Quite paradoxically he is the one affirming at the onset of the novel that what is needed in life is courage (EG, 5).

resigned himself to leading a false existence. His belief in the inevitability of giving up one's own dignity in order to be able to survive the pressures of modern society is what allows him, in the final analysis, to suppress the guilty feelings provoked by the reprehensible act he has committed. In this light, it is easy to understand why Herr Schrader probably perceived his own decision to abandon the grandmother as an act of love. The narrator in fact comments in this regard: 'Er hat es für die nächste Generation getan. Um dem Neuen Raum zu verschaffen' (EG, 14).

Given his mediocrity, the fact that this was the only way in which he could show support for his wife, indicates the fragility of the feeling between Herr and Frau Schrader, whose relationship seems to be based on lies. Recognising the emotional superiority of Frau Schrader, he lives in the fear that she might leave him. When on one occasion she does not come back home, he is convinced that, having finally realised how worthless an individual he is, something which sooner or later was bound to happen, she has abandoned him.

Ultimately, Herr Schrader's problem is rooted in his insecure feelings about whether he can be loved. It is in this respect that this figure can be compared to that of the 'Katzenfütterin': while she faces up to the fact that the rest of society does not see her as being 'worth loving' and finds an alternative way of fulfilling her need for love, Herr Schrader prefers degrading himself by hiding his real self. This happens in his professional life in which he unscrupulously sells himself, in his marriage in which he is scared to show his weaknesses, and even in his spare time where his favourite activity is singing in a choir, a clear reflection of the comfort he finds in being conformist: 'wenn [...] seine Stimme kräftig und

schön in Harmonie mit den anderen Stimmen verschmilzt, werden alle Kümmernisse von ihm abfallen' (EG, 46).⁹³

By behaving in this fashion, Herr Schrader avoids all processes of self-assessment and carries on hiding behind masks to the extent that it is questionable whether he is still aware of who he is in reality. His level of corruption has reached such proportions as to make him first of all conceive, then carry out and finally justify the awful plan of condemning an old and sick human being to a very cruel death. In this sense, Herr Schrader embodies a further stage in Königsdorf's representation of the loss of dignity. If in other works she has often described the process of characters moving towards this state, even without realising it, giving in day after day, here, from the moment in which we encounter Herr Schrader, he has already gone all the way and is left with no dignity at all.

Quite clearly he is unsuccessful in trying to create loving relationships around himself. This is diametrically opposed to the experience of the 'Katzenfütterin', to whom the cats give the strength to cope with the dullness of her everyday life and a purpose for living. However, this is also due to the fact that, while the 'Katzenfütterin' has accepted herself and her condition of not being loveable in society's eyes, Herr Schrader cannot accept who he is and subsequently cannot love others. Although he mistakenly believes that abandoning the grandmother is an act of love, it is clear that such a decision is very selfish. In fact, getting rid of the grandmother had the double advantage that it enabled Herr Schrader to keep the house, which he otherwise would have lost if he had had to pay for

⁹³ Helga Schütz also conveys this idea in her book *Julia oder Erziehung zum Chorgesang*. In this book the fact that Julia is educated to sing in a choir is an image used to draw attention to the pressure to conform which the GDR imposed on its citizens. In the case of Julia, however, she is able to resist this pressure. At a certain point in her life, after her marriage falls apart, she grasps the opportunity to abandon her music career and starts a completely new life. See Schütz, H., *Julia oder Erziehung zum Chorgesang* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1988), first published in 1980.

his mother-in-law's care (EG, 16-17). Moreover, the grandmother's disappearance was supposed to bring peace back to the family.

His inability to love can also be observed in his relationship to his son, for he fails to treat him as an individual. According to him, there is only one way to achieve happiness, and he does not conceive how the son could be satisfied with his lifestyle: 'Er würde ihn gern glücklicher sehn. Glück besteht für Herrn Schrader darin, Weib und Kind zu haben und ein angesehener Bürger zu sein. Er kann sich nicht vorstellen, daß ein Mensch, der nur hinter seinem Computer hockt, glücklich ist' (EG, 19). The fact that father and son remain strangers to each other becomes evident when, after Thomas's nervous breakdown, Herr Schrader realises that he can no longer recall whether Thomas still gets freckles in the summer. He tries to remember because he sees this as 'ein Test [...], ob er seinen Kindern überhaupt noch ins Gesicht sieht' (EG, 87). On the contrary, the love between the 'Katzenfütterin' and her cats seems to be much more based on the acceptance of their individuality. For instance, all the cats have a name and in this case Königsdorf, whose characters are normally very sketchily portrayed, provides a detailed description of the fur of each of the cats as a means of distinguishing them one from the other.

Frau Schrader too has a problematic relationship to her children, as she seems to be caught up in the kind of parental love which is based on the idea that they will fulfil, by being grateful, their parents' need to receive love: 'Warum schafft sich der Mensch denn Kinder an? Damit er etwas zum Lieben hat. Damit er ein bißchen Liebe zurückbekommt' (EG, 73). Not much loved by her mother, Frau Schrader wanted to have children in order to compensate for the lack of love she had experienced as a little girl, only to be disappointed.⁹⁴ She experiences the same disappointment in her

⁹⁴ This idea of having children in order to fulfil one's need for love and then being disappointed is also present in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, in which Frau Franz expresses the following point of view in a conversation with Alice: 'Warum setzt denn der Mensch Kinder in die Welt? Weil er

marriage, in which everything seems to have degenerated into a mindless ritual and routine. The contrast in the relationship between the husband and wife on the one hand and between the 'Katzenfütterin' and the cats on the other can be best illustrated, in my view, through the image of the cats warming up the body of the 'Katzenfütterin' (EG, 59), while the sensation experienced by Frau Schrader lying in bed next to her husband is that of coldness.⁹⁵

Finally, the children do not come across as compassionate human beings, capable of love either. While they strongly criticise their parents, who they define as 'Moneymonks' (EG, 54), they themselves are unable to communicate and resort to technology to express their thoughts to each other. In particular, Thomas seems to have renounced trying to understand life, after being unjustly accused in his childhood of having stolen a cherry and stained the tablecloth with it, while the person really responsible was the father (EG, 32). Since then, he has taken refuge in mathematics, ignoring the needs of those around him at all times, as shown by the fact that he never helped his mother to look after the grandmother. As I will show later, Franziska is a more positive character, but she too is deaf to the mother's cry for help.⁹⁶

5.4.2 Continuity between *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* and the Pre-1989 Works

The most easily identifiable element suggesting continuity between *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* and the pre-1989 works is the similarity of themes between this novel and the short stories. For instance, through the figure of Frau Schrader, Königsdorf examines the theme of women trying

was zum Lieben braucht' [...] 'Wenn sie erst groß sind, entpuppen sie sich aber als eine glatte Fehlinvestition. Du kannst machen, was du willst, am Ende berechnen sie dir immer ein Defizit' (SR, 113).

⁹⁵ 'Die Frau liegt auf dem Bett und fröstelt. Sie drängen sich aneinander, doch die Kälte bleibt' (EG, 21).

⁹⁶ I also dealt with the figures of Thomas and Franziska respectively in section 2.3.2 and in section 1.7.

to find self-realisation within a patriarchal society and through the depiction of a family, in which the grandmother, the parents and the children live together, she analyses the different attitudes of the three generations.

As the above-mentioned themes have already been discussed in the context of Königsdorf's identity as a woman writer and as a scientist, here I will focus on more specific similarities regarding characters and attitudes between *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* and the short stories. In particular, I will focus on *Lichtverhältnisse*, one of the last works written by Königsdorf before the Revolution of 1989, since some aspects of it give the impression that with *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* she is resuming her identity as a creative writer after a temporary dislocation following the changes of 1989-90.

A striking similarity can for instance be observed between the figure of the 'Katzenfütterin' and the protagonist of the short story 'Sachschaden'.⁹⁷ They are both society's outcasts leading a very solitary life, and they both show a very high degree of sensitivity. They also undergo a similar experience in finding obstacles to their kindness in society itself, which seems to regard with suspicion any genuine expression of generosity. The only difference between these two characters is that the 'Katzenfütterin' is at a stage further than the protagonist of 'Sachschaden'. In fact, whereas the latter still believes in people, the 'Katzenfütterin' appears to have lost long ago all hope in the goodness of mankind, which is the reason why she now reserves her kindness for the cats. She does not even look for any kind of recognition for what she does. On the contrary she is under no illusions about whether these efforts are actually appreciated. She is aware of the feelings of irritation that her dedication provokes in her neighbourhood, and in order to be able to carry on

⁹⁷ This short story is part of LV, 33-39. It is also briefly discussed in sections 1.7 and 3.2.2.1.

providing food and shelter for her cats, she has to invent many stratagems and take personal risks.

The obstacles placed by society in the way of generosity make the protagonist of 'Sachschaden', despite the fact that she tries to help the boy by cleaning him up after the accident and wanting to bring him back home, leave the scene and go back to her flat. Unfortunately, she does not have the strength to oppose the rest of the people determined to punish the moped driver for having damaged a parked car. If we compare the two figures, at first glance it seems as if the protagonist of 'Sachschaden' is the weak one giving up her struggle after the first attempt, while the 'Katzenfütterin' comes across as the real rebel against the selfish attitude of society. However, a deeper analysis of the figure of the 'Katzenfütterin' reveals that she relies on the cats because she still has not learned how to love human beings. This deficiency, which can be attributed to the fear of being disappointed, emerges in the relationship between the 'Katzenfütterin' and the woman vet. Although the 'Katzenfütterin' does recognise the high moral value of the vet and feels strongly about her, she does not even run the risk of allowing her love to develop. In fact, she renounces the experience of a relationship with the vet, even before giving it a chance (EG, 94-95). This shortcoming of the 'Katzenfütterin' is also reflected by the fact that when she finds the grandmother, she takes care of her as if she were a cat.

As a feature of Königsdorf's style is to avoid at all times black and white characterisation, it should not come as a surprise that she does not turn these characters living at the border of society into irreproachable heroes, as this would endanger their credibility. Nevertheless, what is important to note is the fact that although they have their faults, the 'Katzenfütterin', as well as Engelchen and Rosi, another two social outcasts, come across as the most humane figures in the novel, just like

Knack, Alfred Stiller⁹⁸ or the protagonist of 'Sachschaden' in *Lichtverhältnisse*,⁹⁹ who, by refusing to conform to society, manage to maintain their dignity.¹⁰⁰ In *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, Königsdorf makes a similar point: even if in contrast to the Schraders these characters seem to have lost their respectability, in reality they are the ones who have preserved some of their dignity, which the bourgeois family has sacrificed to false values. Thus, while the Schraders opt to abandon the sick grandmother in order to be able to keep their house, the alcoholic Rosi washes the clothes of the homeless at the station, and while the members of the family cannot stand each other, the drop-outs form a small community based on solidarity.

Another parallel which can be drawn between *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* and *Lichtverhältnisse* involves the story 'Kirchgang'.¹⁰¹ The opening scene of this novel is in fact reminiscent of the atmosphere depicted in the above-mentioned short story, which also takes place at

⁹⁸ Knack is the protagonist of 'Kugelblitz' (LV, 5-32), while Alfred Stiller is the protagonist of 'Polymax' (LV, 116-125).

⁹⁹ *Lichtverhältnisse* and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* have also both been compared to the work of Heinrich Böll. Ricarda Schmidt draws attention to the fact that Königsdorf's statement in 'Reise im Winter': 'Der Zug wird pünktlich sein' is a variation of Böll's famous story *Der Zug war pünktlich*, written in 1949, portraying the fatalism of the protagonist who is unable to escape death on the Eastern Front. See, Schmid, R., 'History reflected in the imaginary' [see note 55 of Chapter 1], 170. At the same time, Eva Leipprand compares the description of the daily life in the terraced houses, the critical attitude towards the bourgeois mentality of the Schraders in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* to Böll's portraits. See Leipprand, E., 'Mit leeren Händen', *Hessischer Rundfunk*, 19.07.1997. Furthermore, in the review by Rainer Moritz, 'Killerphrasen', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 13.08.1997, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* is compared to Böll's short story 'Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit', written in 1951. The parallel is clear: in both stories the main principle seems to be that of 'Haltung bewahren'. While in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* this makes Herr Schrader dump the grandmother, in Böll's story the obsession of a woman wanting to celebrate Christmas every day leads her husband to engage actors for the daily ritual in order to replace the real members of the family, including himself since he has a double life. In short, in both stories, in order to keep up appearances, people live in a world made of lies where problems are never confronted. In general, these parallels made in the above mentioned secondary literature are based on the fact that both Böll and Königsdorf are authors of ironical, grotesque and satirical short stories. They both see themselves responsible for society's development and portray in their work simple people, often drop-outs who preserved their humanity. They both set their hopes on women and on the younger generation as, to use one of Kaufmann's expressions, 'TrägerInnen neuer Impulse', and show the coldness of a mentality based on economic profit. Finally, they both describe intimate, private situations in order to draw attention to society's shortcomings.

¹⁰⁰ This point was also discussed in section 3.2.2.1 with regard to the theme of dignity in Königsdorf's pre-1989 works.

¹⁰¹ This story was also discussed in section 1.5.

Christmas and portrays the effort made by a family trying to act as such on a traditional occasion for families to reunite. In both cases, Königsdorf makes it clear that the members of the families she is describing, and especially the children, have no desire to be together. On the contrary, they are indifferent to the efforts of the parents to create a joyful atmosphere by lighting up the candles on the Christmas tree, preparing the meal or singing Christmas carols. They all go along with the Christmas rituals, which obviously have lost their meaning completely, and they play the game of 'Haltung bewahren' (EG, 31), while they would prefer to be somewhere else. The Schraders secretly hope that they are only imagining the situation they are in, but they have to come to the realisation that: '[...] es ist kein Theaterstück, da fällt kein Vorgang. Es ist auch kein Traum, aus dem man irgendwann erwacht. Das ist nun wirklich ihr Leben' (EG, 35). In 'Kirchgang', after the female protagonist realises that she does not need much imagination to predict how the day is going to progress (LV, 141), the thought of staying in the house becomes unbearable. In the attempt to break away from the mindless rituals which are going to take place, she invites her family to join her in going to church. However, their indifference is such that they fail to see that she is trying to provoke them.

The similarities between the short stories and this novel - which after all is not much longer than a story - are also apparent in the sarcasm, the black humour and the grotesque elements emerging from both works. Thus, the irony of the decision made by Herr Schrader to abandon the grandmother in order to protect his 'intact family' and remain 'credit-worthy',¹⁰² while ending up with a family falling apart and having to

¹⁰² The importance of remaining 'credit-worthy' seems to have been one of those principles which has heavily influenced Königsdorf's education. In DC, she mentions the fact that her father went through the change of regime after the war with the preoccupation of protecting his reputation of being credit-worthy (DC, 36). In *Gleich neben Afrika*, as at a party she feels like doing something unconventional, she feels constrained by the words of her father haunting her with the admonition: 'Mädchen, ein guter Ruf verliert sich nur einmal. Hauptsache, kreditwürdig bleiben' (GA, 111). Finally, in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, Königsdorf plays with the concept of being credit-worthy since 'seine größere Kreditwürdigkeit' (EG, 10) is the reason why Herr Schrader and not Frau Schrader receives the house owned by the grandmother. In the end, while he probably ends

disappear from the scene, is comparable to the apparently harmless lie of the editor in 'Polymax', who, by suppressing information about the fatal flaw in the Polymax computer programme, caused his own death. However, as Eva Kaufmann has pointed out with regard to *Lichtverhältnisse*, 'aufkommendes Lachen [bleibt] meist in der Kehle stecken',¹⁰³ implying that the bitter laughter, which both the short stories and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* provoke, has no entertaining purpose, but is rather intended as a stimulus to reflect on the ridiculous situations described.

While it is clear that irony or black humour do not have the function of making it easier for the readers to accept the grim subject matter of a grandmother being abandoned, they enable Königsdorf to tell the story from a certain distance, which she achieves also by introducing a third-person narrator. In this manner, she can leave to the readers the task of drawing their own conclusions on what she narrates. In other words, she provokes them to face up to a problematic issue such as the care of the elderly in modern society without trying to influence the way in which they should approach it.

Furthermore, since the comic effect is achieved here through the exaggeration or distortion of a certain situation, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* also assumes a warning function. By exaggerating society's attitude towards old people through the Schraders' decision to 'dump' the grandmother, Königsdorf is warning her readers that society is not developing in the right direction. The message seems to be that what she is now fictionalising in her novel could in fact be tomorrow's reality. This leads us to the conclusion that Königsdorf still believes in the Cassandra

up in jail for having abandoned the grandmother, she is the one to whom 'den Kredit [...] hat man ohne weiteres bewilligt' (EG, 120) to finance her project of a guest house.

¹⁰³ Kaufmann, E., 'Von Sach- und anderen Zwängen' [see note 30 of the Introduction], 245.

function of literature, which is also a feature of her pre-1989 works, especially *Respektloser Umgang* and *Lichtverhältnisse*.¹⁰⁴

Both the warning and encouraging roles, which literature should play according to this principle, are visible in this work. As I have discussed above, the exaggeration of an attitude already existing in society is the warning element, which is intensified by the fact that the abandonment of the grandmother is not placed at the end of the novel. By underplaying the act of abandonment and concentrating instead on the repercussions that this act has on the remaining members of the family, not only does Königsdorf draw attention to the problem itself, but also shows the drastic consequences that an attempted quick solution might bring.

The encouraging aspect of this work is the fact that Königsdorf demonstrates that there are possibilities of living within society without losing one's dignity, which did not seem to be possible in her post-unification novels. She mainly places her hopes of progress in women as represented by Frau Schrader and in the younger generation as represented by Franziska. Frau Schrader has in fact the courage to begin a new life after having realised that it is high time to start respecting herself, instead of constantly subordinating herself to others in order to receive love. Franziska, despite the difficulty she experiences in communicating with her parents, has a lot of ideals and the determination to pursue them. As she leaves her parental house to start living independently, she writes to her brother:

Ich gehe jetzt. [...] Nicht wegen der Großmutter. Nicht einmal wegen unserer Eltern, auch wenn ich eines genau weiß, ich möchte nicht so werden wie sie. Ich möchte für vieles offen bleiben und auch die Fähigkeit bewahren, mich zu ändern. (EG, 81)

¹⁰⁴ I also discuss the Cassandra function of literature in the Conclusion, as an example of an element of continuity linking Königsdorf's pre- and post-unification works, which nevertheless is applied differently to her latest works, such as *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* and the story 'Der gewöhnliche Wahnsinn'.

5.4.3 *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* Compared to *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*

This underlying sense of hope and the encouragement given by Königsdorf to living according to one's individuality, this re-discovery of her provocative voice are not only indicative of the continuities between this novel and the pre-1989 works, but also clear signs that she has overcome that sense of desolation and disorientation which marked *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*. Perhaps the element which best illustrates that *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* represents a progression from the two novels which preceded it is the way in which the narration moves away from the problematic relationship between East and West. In fact, the reader is not told where the events take place, although, as Eva Kaufmann asserts, 'die Handlung [spielt] doch unverkennbar hier und jetzt'.¹⁰⁵ From the little information Königsdorf gives us about the Schrader family - for example we know that Herr Schrader was recently made redundant - one could assume that the reality described is that of an Eastern German family. However, as the narration is about the human capacity to love, the fact that we do not know in which part of Germany the two stories are situated avoids all complications regarding the alleged moral superiority of the East over the West or vice versa, which I have previously discussed with reference to the two brothers in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*. Here it is solely a question of the shortcomings of a society, regardless of its geographical location or political orientation, in the field of human relations.

Despite these main differences, there are however some aspects of *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* which can be linked to the post-unification novels. Like *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, it does not contain autobiographical elements and is written in the third person. Furthermore, in both novels, Königsdorf adopts a wider perspective on events by

¹⁰⁵ Kaufmann, E., 'Rette sich wer kann' [see note 30 of the Introduction], 130.

introducing a large number of characters in order to present various reactions to life after unification. In *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, Königsdorf develops this trend much further, as she does not just create more than one main character, but structures the plot of the novel around two parallel stories, one which sees the Schraders as protagonists and one in which the main character is a 'Katzenfütterin'. The two stories overlap only at the end, when the 'Katzenfütterin' comes across the supposed lost grandmother of the Schrader family. If one tries to look beyond the narrated events, then it becomes clear that Königsdorf juxtaposes these two stories in order to outline the contrast between two diametrically opposed dimensions: the conformist one embodied by the very conventional Schraders versus the non-conformist one represented by the 'Katzenfütterin' who has rejected society and dedicated herself to looking after the abandoned cats in the city.

A less apparent aspect of continuity is perhaps the fact that one could see the moral degradation of a society, which allows a man to justify to himself the fact that he has abandoned an old and defenceless woman, as Königsdorf's attempt to fulfil her own predictions. In the post-unification interviews¹⁰⁶ as well as in *Gleich neben Afrika*, she more than once played the role of Cassandra by voicing her conviction that 'es würden sehr schlechte Zeiten kommen' (GA, 23). In this sense, it is therefore possible to see *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* as an attempt to illustrate the accuracy of her prediction and the justification for her feelings of distrust and pessimism towards contemporary society, which Königsdorf expressed in the two previous novels. In fact, the system can ultimately be seen as responsible for not offering any assistance to the Schraders but instead confronting them with the stark choice between the uselessness of the sick grandmother and the usefulness of a house in a time of great financial uncertainties. Although Franziska and Frau Schrader embody the element

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Großmann and Hanig [see note 77 of Chapter 3].

of hope of the novel, it is also important to note that they reach a full awareness of the situation only after the grandmother has been abandoned. In reality, by refusing to find out how Herr Schrader solved the 'problem', they make themselves his accomplices. Hence, it seems that they need to plumb the depths before realising where they stand.

One could argue that this is the very reason why Königsdorf decides to magnify this issue, that is to prevent society from reaching such an extreme. However, the fact that in order to exaggerate the problem of caring for the elderly by combining a model of reality, in this case a 'normal' family, with fictional elements, instead of adding an explicit warning to her work in line with her understanding of the Cassandra function of literature, she ends up almost obtaining the opposite result. Similarly to *Gleich neben Afrika*, in which the parodic aspect of the novel undermines the credibility of the serious arguments it puts forward, at the same time, in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, the exaggerations have the effect of making the gravity of its subject matter easier to dismiss. A similar remark was made by Eva Kaufmann, who in her review commented as follows:

Nur ist die Mischung aus modellhafter Anlage und partiell romanhafter Ausfüllung nicht günstig. Die angedeuteten komplizierten seelischen Mechanismen und Brüche wirken vergrößert. Man kann sich beim Lesen das Vorgeführte, das doch wohl nachhaltigen Schrecken auslösen soll, leicht vom Leibe halten.¹⁰⁷

5.5 Conclusion

The analysis of these four novels suggests that *Respektloser Umgang*, even if it was the first one to be written, remains perhaps the most successful. In no other work has Königsdorf achieved such a balance between the various elements in the text. *Respektloser Umgang* is in fact informative, up-to-date, critical and challenging. It is still interesting today because it both portrays attitudes in the GDR in the 1980s and discusses themes of

¹⁰⁷ Kaufmann, E., 'Rette sich wer kann', 131.

universal validity. It was interesting at the time when it was written because of the debate it launched and the courage it gave to people to question the status quo.

However, if it is true that *Respektloser Umgang* was written at a time when Königsdorf's various identities were well-defined and stable, this is certainly not the case with the following two works. While in 1986 Königsdorf was a GDR citizen, supportive of its socialist ideals, pursuing a career as a scientist, when *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* were written she was trying to come to terms with the collapse of her socialist utopia, in unified Germany, as a full-time writer for the first time in her life. It should therefore come as no surprise if these works include elements betraying new insecurities, which did not form part of Königsdorf's previous works. It is also in this light that we should place the fact that, in the attempt to protect her former fellow citizens from feeling humiliated, she ends up fostering a separate sense of identity for the Eastern Germans. In short, what emerges from these novels is that Königsdorf has understandably still not overcome the differences between East and West, and that her feelings are still fluctuating between the hope that a new Germany without prejudices can be created, the anger at the way in which the GDR past is being treated, and feelings of solidarity with the Eastern Germans.

Nonetheless, I believe that the importance of these works lies in the fact that they offer an invaluable insight into life after unification, observed and commented on from a GDR perspective. Furthermore, *Gleich neben Afrika* also illustrates the difficulties Königsdorf is having as a creative writer at this particular point in time. Thus, the value of these first works after 1990 consists chiefly in the fact that they reflect the transitional character of the years in which they were written, not just because of their subject matter, but because they themselves display many transitional

elements destined to disappear once Königsdorf had time to familiarise herself with the new situation. After all, if *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* present weak characteristics which did not feature in her previous works, one should also remember how much was being demanded of Eastern German intellectuals at this time. As Ursula Beitter observes:

Offensichtlich ist jedoch, daß aus unserer Sicht viel von den ehemaligen Ost-Autoren verlangt wird: sie sollen kurzfristig nicht nur ihre eigene Vergangenheit sondern auch die ihres Staates, sowie die der Kriegesjahre be- und verarbeiten und sich den Spielregeln der Marktwirtschaft anpassen. Außerdem wird erwartet, daß sie sich auch über das neue Deutschland, seine Rolle in der EU und in der globalen Wirtschaft, Gedanken machen.¹⁰⁸

Hence, while these two works seem to represent a separate chapter in Königsdorf's career, in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* her identity is much better defined. Many of the insecurities prevailing in the preceding novels have faded away; and some elements of her past identity have been re-discovered, such as the Cassandra function of literature. The new self-confidence emerging from *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* is also indicative of the fact that her other identities have reached a certain degree of stability. The fact that for example the problems of East-West integration do not feature in this novel, where Königsdorf has abandoned her specific GDR perspective, illustrates that when she wrote *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* she felt more at ease with her role as a writer and as a citizen within united Germany, and had gained the courage 'sich einzumischen' in issues affecting post-unification society as a whole.

Although I have pointed out that her new stratagem of tackling social issues by depicting them in their extreme form could be seen as fulfilling the Cassandra function of literature, it should also be noted that before 1989 Königsdorf did not find it necessary to exaggerate the problems to which she intended to attract attention. In contrast, the warning aspect of her pre-

¹⁰⁸ Beitter, U. E. (ed.), *Schreiben im heutigen Deutschland* [see note 82 above], xxi.

1989 work was particularly effective because it was based on the idea of 'Angst aus Wissen' (RU, 94), that is the fear generated by the awareness of what the real situation is like. Hence, the exaggerated pessimism of *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* raises the suspicion that Königsdorf's aim was fulfil her own predictions of the post-unification period when she believed that things were not going to improve in the future. The glimpse of hope embodied by Franziska's and Frau Schrader's determination remains isolated, as in the end they are the only two figures in the microcosm here described who have learnt from this experience while the society surrounding them is still convinced that what is important is 'Haltung [zu] bewahren' (EG, 120).

Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined five main aspects of Königsdorf's identity in order to outline her literary development from the beginning of her career as a writer in 1978 until 1998, the year in which she published her latest work. In the conclusion my aim is to bring these five identities together in order to present some concluding remarks on her evolution as a writer, with particular reference to her published work since unification.

I have shown that during the GDR years Königsdorf had established a well-defined identity as a writer working towards the realisation of socialism who had the courage to deal with contemporary issues critically. This emerges to various extents from all of her pre-1989 works, whether she discusses issues related to women's emancipation, criticises the scientific establishment or fights against the general alienation of the individual. Although she is mainly interested in criticising the status quo within the GDR in order to move one step closer to the socialist utopia, as a consequence of the unstable political situation of the 1980s which threatened countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain, she also faces issues of global resonance. Especially in the two novels, *Respektloser Umgang* and *Ungelegener Befund*, Königsdorf confronts the delicate issues of the responsibility of society and in particular of scientists in preventing science from being abused and threatening the welfare of mankind. By making the readership aware of the similarities existing between the situation during the Cold War and the Second World War, Königsdorf is clearly concerned that the mistakes of the past could be repeated. As she felt she could not be a passive spectator of what was happening around her, over the years from 1978 to the fall of the Wall, she gradually developed into a writer, who, while maintaining her socialist orientation, became increasingly aware of the global political situation and engaged in contributing to the

improvement of it through the promotion of humanitarian values such as respect for human dignity and life.

Königsdorf, like other Eastern German intellectuals who supported socialism and strongly identified with the GDR, experienced unification as the end of her hopes and dreams of reforming socialism. Nonetheless, both the 'peaceful Revolution' and the resulting unification also represented a very strong stimulus to her to reconsider her ideas and positions, a challenge which she welcomed as an opportunity to renew and reinvigorate herself. In 1989-90, she was clearly striving to play a part in the development of a new cultural discourse within unified Germany. This is demonstrated by her non-fictional works of this period, *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*, *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen* and *Adieu DDR*, in which she courageously analyses her personal dilemmas, examines past and present political events and tries to re-establish touch with the readership. Although she did not conceal her disappointment at the way in which GDR culture was demonised during the process of unification, in this period she found a new purpose for writing: making sure that the experiences of the people who lived in the GDR and through the extraordinary historical phase of the 'peaceful Revolution' were well documented for posterity and also for those who were not directly involved. This is the manner in which she felt she could react to the demonisation of the GDR while contributing to the unification process of the two Germanies.

Königsdorf's new aim, combined with her desire to offer solidarity to her fellow citizens in this time of uncertainty, are the main factors underlying her first post-unification fictional works, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*. These novels clearly reveal that in the first years after unification Königsdorf was still going through a transitional phase. On the one hand, she tried to promote understanding of the

humiliations suffered by the Eastern Germans during the process of unification. However, by doing so she ended up strengthening already existing stereotypes and prejudices. On the other hand, she tried to explain life in Eastern Germany before and after unification to those who did not experience it, but failed to take into account either the Western German perspective on the events or the development of Western Germany over the forty years of separation.

Although in these two works it seems that she is slipping into nostalgic feelings for the GDR, in her next non-fictional works, *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* and *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, she shows her unwillingness to be trapped by the past. The many essays and articles she produced in the post-unification period attest to Königsdorf's desire to remain involved in the intellectual discourse of contemporary society. Most of the issues she tackles here, such as ecology, are of broad modern-day significance. Instead of the resigned and nostalgic attitude which emerges from her first post-1990 novels, Königsdorf proposes in these writings a dynamic quest for solutions to the world's problems, thus showing her refusal to give in to her fears that the present-day situation is incapable of being improved. Here, she wins back her hope for a better future, which reflects the optimism she had displayed in *Respektloser Umgang*. This is confirmed by her concluding sentence in the 1994 essay 'Die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt', which positively declares: 'Die Welt ist rettbar!' (RW, 122). Furthermore, the fact that her second collection of interviews, *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, involves both Eastern and Western Germans citizens also indicates her openness towards Germany as a whole and her desire to feel part of it.

The experiences which Königsdorf underwent in producing her non-fictional writings helped her to overcome the uncertainties characterising her two previous novels. This is apparent in her latest novel, *Die*

Entsorgung der Großmutter, in which she stops presenting an Eastern German perspective and focuses more widely on an unresolved issue in many modern societies: the care of the elderly. Moreover, the fact that this novel displays a well-balanced mixture of new and old elements demonstrates that Königsdorf was able to retain some features of her GDR literary identity which she considered important, drop others made redundant by the changes of 1989-90 and acquire some new ones reflecting these new broader concerns.

Since *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* seems to be from many points of view the work in which Königsdorf has embarked on the transition from being a GDR writer to being a writer in unified Germany, its analysis also reveals how she has adjusted to her new role. This is particularly evident if we take into consideration one of the elements of continuity linking the pre- and post-unification works, the Cassandra function of literature, and we examine how Königsdorf adapts it in her most recent works. While the Cassandra function remains a feature of Königsdorf's work, the different way in which she applies it to *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, or even to her very latest story 'Der gewöhnliche Wahnsinn',¹ shows how she is reacting to the new cultural scene. In the light of the widespread sense of marginalisation experienced by many former GDR intellectuals who after unification had the feeling of talking in a vacuum, in the above-mentioned works Königsdorf seems to turn the warning function she attributes to literature into a means of scaring and shocking the audience in order to attract their attention.

The exaggeration of society's attitudes, as illustrated in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* where the dumping of the grandmother exemplifies the lack of respect towards the elderly, is also a characteristic of Königsdorf's pre-1989 works, but only as a means of creating a sense of the

¹ This story is part of the eponymous collection of 1998, 181-197.

grotesque and the absurd. Here, by contrast, her exaggerated descriptions are presented as reality. In other words, in the anonymity of the new society, which, in Königsdorf's view, lacks a sense of common purpose, she feels that she has to scream louder if she wants to be heard. As a result, instead of relying on the basic principle underlying *Respektloser Umgang* that the fear from knowing the truth will challenge the readership to take action, she is no longer simply raising awareness about the situation, but scaring the readership with the possible consequences that society's shortcomings might have. Thus, in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, she seems to imply that unless a solution is found to the problem of the elderly, people might start dumping their grandmothers.

The use of exaggeration reaches an even higher degree in 'Der gewöhnliche Wahnsinn', in which Königsdorf tells the story of a man, Maximilian Gutt, who tries to behave like a responsible citizen but gets punished for it. After hearing news on the radio of a campaign of letter-bombing, he reacts cautiously when he himself gets a package by calling the police. After they establish that he has in fact not received a bomb, he is made to look ridiculous; this ends up costing him his job and his tranquil existence. As he receives another package which this time is ticking away, the police do not take him seriously, with the consequence that his house is blown up. He therefore becomes the embodiment of a contemporary Cassandra, whose warnings, similarly to those sounded by Königsdorf in her writings, are disregarded.

In the end, as a way of silencing him, he is sent to a psychiatric clinic. Königsdorf even suggests that, as he has no money and is therefore a burden on society, he is liquidated. Ironically, as he is taken to the hospital, he sees the building where he was living exploding. While the fate of Gutt might represent Königsdorf's own fear about her role as a

Cassandra,² the image of a bomb as a metaphor for the threats existing within our society and the way in which Gutt is removed from society interfere with the realism contained in the story. This results in a weakening of the impact that Königsdorf strives to have on her readership. As discussed in Chapter Five with regard to *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, the fact that the warning aspect of the Cassandra function is achieved through a combination of realistic elements and exaggerated representations of society's shortcomings makes these works easier to dismiss, thus going against Königsdorf's intention of provoking reactions.³

Königsdorf's decision to shock her readers as a means of forcing them into awareness seems to be her final attempt to overcome the general lack of interest shown by society in what intellectuals like her have to say. During the 'peaceful Revolution' she seemed aware that Eastern German intellectuals, as a result of the fact that they were highly regarded within the GDR, were bound to suffer from the loss of their status, but showed that she was nevertheless determined to contribute to promoting a critical culture within the new society. With the passing of the years, however, she gets the impression that her contribution to the public discourse is neither wanted nor appreciated and ends up feeling increasingly marginalised.

After the hesitations of her first fictional works of the 1990s, she published *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, on the basis of her belief that '[...] die geistige Vorarbeit [muß] unverzüglich aus dem Ghettodasein heraus und zu einer Bewegung werden, die die Masse ergreift' (RW, 122). However, this optimistic phase was short-lived. Although in these essays she had found a new creative goal to pursue in her commitment to improving the condition of the world, comments such as

² In an interview with Seidel, Königsdorf says that her fear of the authorities which she experienced during the GDR years has been replaced by the fear of the media [see note 44 of Chapter 4].

³ In section 5.4.3 I noted that the first critic to draw attention to this problem was Eva Kaufmann.

‘Diese Thesen [the ones in RW] wirken ebenso solitär wie voraussetzungslos. [...] Sie kommen verspätet’⁴ explain her feelings of isolation and inadequacy as an intellectual voice. It is not by chance, I believe, that she often asks her readership whether they also share her preoccupation with the future of the world, thus showing that her feelings of isolation not only relate to her identity as an intellectual, but also as a citizen.⁵ Not surprisingly, this has led her to feel increasingly bitter, to the point that she has been refusing recently to make public her ideas on how to ‘save the world’. As mentioned in Chapter Four, in an interview in 1997 she stated: ‘Zum Beispiel wüßte ich schon, wie die Welt zu retten wäre. Aber ich behalte das für mich. Weil die Welt ja doch nicht gerettet werden will’.⁶

The fact that she felt her reflections were making no impact on the public discourse might be a reason why, after the publication of *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, she returned to creative writing. However, as discussed above, in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* and ‘Der gewöhnliche Wahnsinn’, Königsdorf did not manage any better to overcome her feeling of being marginalised. Her disillusionment at her failure to influence society can be illustrated, in my view, by comparing *Respektloser Umgang* and *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*. In line with Hölderlin’s dictum ‘Wo Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch’,⁷ one of the last images of *Respektloser Umgang* represents the narrator observing that the birds continue to migrate, even though there are fewer of them now, which implies that there is still time to act before they disappear completely. By contrast, in *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* we know almost from the

⁴ ‘Mut zu stolzen Tönen’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18.01.1995.

⁵ For instance, at the beginning of the essay ‘Lieben Sie Schmetterlinge’, she asks: ‘Haben Sie Kinder oder Enkelkinder? Erzählen Sie denen Märchen? Denken Sie auch manchmal daran, daß die Erbschaft, die wir hinterlassen, vorwiegend aus Disneyland und Giftmüll bestehen wird?’ (RW, 9).

⁶ See section 4.5.

⁷ Cited by Schwinn, R., in his review of RW, *Leseart*, 04.1994.

beginning that something terrible has happened to the grandmother and nothing can be done to save her from her cruel fate.

Königsdorf seemed to share these feelings of powerlessness and marginalisation, not just with other former GDR intellectuals, but also with left-wing Western German intellectuals. In general, in the aftermath of the German-German literature dispute all writers supporting the view that literature should have a social function found themselves out of step with the times. In his article on the situation of intellectuals in unified Germany, Ernst Keller speaks of 'fallen idols'⁸ and cites Frank Schirrmacher saying:

In ihren Büchern aber haben die wichtigen jungen Autoren die Repräsentanten des literarischen Lebens in Deutschland längst verlassen. Weder Grass noch Härtling, weder Christa Wolf noch Stefan Heym haben irgendeinen Einfluß auf die jüngere deutsche Literatur.⁹

In this context, it seems significant that, on the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Wall, the *Spiegel* described the situation of the former GDR intellectuals of Königsdorf's generation unflatteringly and in a few short paragraphs. This implies that they no longer seemed to appeal to a wide readership:

Nach dem Ende der DDR verschwanden aber nicht nur Bühnen und Ensembles, sondern vor allem die Autorität des Künstlers. Kurz: Dem Osten ist die alte intellektuelle Mitte abhanden gekommen. Zwar ist Christoph Hein gesamtdeutscher PEN-Präsident geworden, sein aktuelles Drama 'In Acht und Bahn' aber, eine Art Fortschreibung seiner erfolgreichen Politbüro-Travestie 'Die Ritter der Tafelrunde' von 1989, fand nur mäßiges Interesse. Über Christa Wolf redet man zehn Jahre nach der Wende nur noch, weil sie 70 wurde, und Heiner Müller ist tot'.¹⁰

This article, even if it only superficially deals with the intellectual scene in Eastern Germany, nevertheless reflects the sense of the diminished

⁸ Keller, E., 'Fallen Idols: German Intellectuals and Writers facing the Demise of the GDR', in Monteath, P. and Alter, R. (eds), *Kulturstreit – Streitkultur: German Literature since the Wall*, *German Monitor* 38 (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), 35-50.

⁹ See Anz, T., *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf* (Munich: Spangenberg, 1991), 190-191.

¹⁰ Lehmann, A. and Mohr, R., 'Im Osten was Neues', *Der Spiegel*, 08.11.1999.

importance and influence of the intellectuals who dominated cultural life in the GDR and who in October 1989 hoped to introduce socialism ‘with a human face’. While it suggests that the time of this intellectual generation is up, the article draws attention to the new talents emerging from the former East Germany. One of them is certainly Thomas Brussig. The way in which this young author, born in 1965, in his two works *Helden wie wir* and *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*,¹¹ has managed to talk about the GDR without bitterness or nostalgic feelings as the place in which he grew up has met the approval of a new, younger readership. His success was such that his works have also been made into films which have filled cinemas across Germany. Symptomatic of the way in which the younger audience dismisses the intellectuals of Königsdorf’s generation, Brussig ironically deals in his *Helden wie wir* with Christa Wolf’s writings and her role during the Revolution in 1989. He first confuses her speech with that of an ice-skating trainer. Then, after the protagonist is claiming the credit for opening the Wall, he frantically reads all of Wolf’s works to check whether she did at any time protest against the Wall, since she had not done it in her speech on 4 November 1989:

Ich wollte in ihren Büchern so lange suchen, bis ich meine Tat mit ihren Worten entschuldigen kann. Irgendwo würde sich schon etwas finden! Da kann ich wieder ruhig schlafen! Dann bräuchte ich nicht denn Bannfluch der Dichter und Denker zu fürchten! Vielleicht war Christa sehr für die Maueröffnung? Vielleicht hat sie sogar mit *Gefühlswörtern* hantiert? *Stell dir vor die Mauer ist weg*, und so weiter. Dann könnte man mir nicht mehr allein das Ende der Geschichte anhängen! Dann könnte ich geltend machen, daß ich im Einklang mit den aufklärtesten Geistern der Gesellschaft gehandelt hätte.¹²

While the ideals of the Eastern German intellectuals and the compromises they accepted in their pursuit of those ideals might seem absurd to the younger generation, I nevertheless believe that the works of an author such as Königsdorf will in due course be re-evaluated. What I see as one of the most important reasons for researching her literary production is, without

¹¹ Brussig, T., *Helden wie wir* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1995), and *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1999).

¹² Brussig, T., *Helden wie wir* [see note 11 above], 306.

doubt, the fact that her works offer the personal experience of a writer who witnessed the demise of the secular utopia of socialism for which she had engaged as a GDR scientist and published writer, who got involved in the revolutionary changes of 1989, and who had to make fundamental adjustments to continue her career in unified Germany.

Although during the German-German literature dispute various attempts were made to dismiss the GDR and its culture, an East German identity persisted, thus showing that the memory of East-West antagonism could not be simply erased with the act of political and economic unification. This seems a further reason for a detailed re-assessment of the cultural scene of the GDR. Only by investigating more closely GDR lifestyle, thought patterns and public discourse, will it be possible to understand the impact of the political watershed of 1989 on the Eastern Germans and their consequent reaction to life in unified Germany. Hence, as Königsdorf's works are often based on her experience and represent her short-term reaction to the reality around her, they portray different aspects of life before and after unification. Not only, as Eva Kaufmann has noted with regard to *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*, is each of her works 'ein Stück Zeitbild'¹³ and therefore a window onto the historical reality of the GDR and post-unification Germany. They are also revealing in the sense that the style in which they were written, the message they deliver and the themes they deal with tell us something about the identity of the writer who wrote them. Thus, they are also illustrative of the evolution of cultural discourse in the various historical phases.

Moreover, since the consequences of the changes of 1989-90 have been very different for the various social groups within GDR society, any generalisation about 'the East German experience' would be seriously misleading. Brussig's account, and the tone in which he conveys it, will by

¹³ Kaufmann, E., 'Erzählen aus Nahdistanz' [see note 28 of the Introduction], 131.

necessity have little in common with Königsdorf's. Only by appreciating the complexity of Königsdorf's identity can the distinctiveness of her generation's experience be properly understood. In this respect, her work continues to fulfil an important historical need.

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